

Concepts of Female Sexuality in Hong Kong

WANG, Guan

A Thesis submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Philosophy
in
Anthropology

The Chinese University of Hong Kong
September 2011



Abstract

Hong Kong prides itself in being a modern city, but when we consider people's attitudes towards sexuality, we find that people still value many so-called "traditional" ideas. Although gender equality has been a topic of public debate for many decades, this has not extended to the realm of sexuality. Many people do not think that males and females should enjoy equal rights in their sex lives. However, to date, no research has been done to understand how single females in Hong Kong understand and treat their sexuality. This prompted my study of female sexuality in Hong Kong.

Based on ethnographic data, including 18 in-depth interviews with single females ranging in age from 23 to 56, and coming from different educational, religious, sexual orientation, and family backgrounds, I examine how single females understand sexuality. I categorized my informants into three groups based on their sexual experiences and attitudes towards sexuality: they are the "moralists", the "mainstreams" and the "radicals". I argue that single females in Hong Kong have very diversified ways of treating sex, but irrespective of individuals' attitudes towards sexuality, rationalization of sexual practices was carried out by adopting conventional social values shaped by patriarchal ideas. By looking at the similarities and differences among my informants, the thesis shows that patriarchal attitudes and controls on female sexuality have continued despite Hong Kong's inroads into "modernity".

論文摘要

香港是一個「現代大都市」，但香港人對性的觀念，似乎並不完全“現代”。縱使男女平等之類的議題受到關注，但在性觀念方面，香港人並不認為男女可以享有同樣的權利。從沒有人研究過香港的單身女性如何理解性，對待性。這也是我為何選了香港女性為研究對象的原因。

本文對十八位年齡由 23 至 56 歲，不同宗教，不同教育程度，不同性傾向，不同家庭背景的女性做了深入訪談。試圖以他們的例子展示香港女性對性的不同看法。依照被訪者的性經驗，我將他們分為三組，分別是“道德派”，“主流派”和“激進派”。研究發現，雖然我得被訪者有迥然不同的性態度，然而他們都在試圖以不同得理由將自己的選擇和理化。從他們給出的種種理由，我們不難發現父權的影子。通過比較三組被訪者的異同，本文揭示了社會對女性的性規範，以及傳統的父權思想是怎樣與現代社會並存的。

Declaration of Anonymity and Confidentiality

In this study, all fieldwork data presented has been edited in order to preserve informants' anonymity. All names used were pseudonyms. Non-relevant personal information was changed to protect my informants' identities.

Acknowledgements

I began my M.Phil. in Anthropology without any doubts, however, as time passed quickly by, I became more and more confused. I became both confused about my thesis and also about my life. Never before had I ever realized myself as being so incapable, both in terms of writing and in managing my life. Here, I would like to thank a number of people who had helped me in different ways to bring this thesis to an end.

First, I am grateful to all the professors in the Department, and especially to my supervisor Dr. Maria Tam. Her constant encouragement saved me from giving up the pursuit of the M.Phil. She has been very patient and tolerated my sloppiness, and at other times was listening and caring when I felt lost and hopeless. Under her guidance, Dr. Tam was never short of inspiration and had asked insightful and thought-provoking questions, prompting me to further think about many issues. She had also given me the room and flexibility to write whatever I wanted. Second, I also must thank Dr. Wu Keping and Dr. Gordon Mathews and an anonymous external examiner for their time and efforts spent in reading this thesis and for all their valuable suggestions.

Next, I would like to acknowledge my classmates. They have been so willing to share their ideas on the topic. A special thanks goes to Cassandra and Scott. These two people are a part of the three-member 'triad'—which I am also a part of—was a source of vital support which sustained throughout this long haul. Cassandra Chan had coped with my clumsiness and tried to stop me from procrastinating, while Scott McKay was exploited by me up until the very last minute, and is now helping me with the final copy editing process.

Due to the sensitive nature of my research, it was extremely difficult to find

informants. So, I would also like to thank all the people who have offered me help in introducing potential informants. In particular, I wish to acknowledge my best friend Yin who was always there and made me believe in myself that both finding people to interview was possible as finishing this thesis— both which took a lot longer time than expected.

Most important of all, this thesis would not have been written without the willingness and support of my informants. Although I cannot publically or adequately express my deepest gratitude to them here, especially when they may be in potential trouble if their identities were exposed. I think the readers of this thesis will be thanking my informants for sharing their innermost feelings with me.

Finally, last but not least, I would like to thank my family for their unconditional love and support. During this time, I got all the privileges as a ‘member of the family’ and was exempted from taking part in ‘family duties.’ They have invested both their time and money in me to do a piece of work that they might not even have chance to read.

Table of Contents

Abstract	i
論文摘要	i
Declaration of Anonymity and Confidentiality	ii
Chapter 1 Introduction	1
Chapter 2 The Moralists	25
Chapter 3 The Mainstreams	73
Chapter 4 The Radicals	110
Chapter 5 Conclusion	140
Appendix: Interview Protocol	167
References Cited	169

Chapter 1 Introduction

Sexuality in Hong Kong

Hong Kong prides itself in being a cosmopolitan city. There is great cultural diversity here, as can be seen in the vast number of fashion styles, international cuisines, and even religious organizations on offer in the city. To the casual observer, it would seem that Hongkongers are very open-minded, as they are willing to accept ideas from all over the world. However, this liberal attitude has not extended to the realm of sexuality. Whether it is in formal education, socialization at home, or in popular culture, we have standard requirements on how sexuality can and should be expressed. This is especially true when it comes to the sexuality of females. My research examines three core questions: 1) What are the differences and similarities between informants who have made different choices in their sexuality? 2) How do informants justify their behaviors? 3) How do the answers to the first two questions reflect the changes and continuities of social norms acting on unmarried females in Hong Kong?

Although gender equality has been part of popular discourse in Hong Kong for over half a century, and we can see that today women enjoy more or less equal opportunities in education and employment as their male counterparts, the idea of equality has not extended to the realm of sexuality. A double standard regarding sex clearly exists for women and men. Several local newspapers reported the results of a survey done by Durex on sexual wellbeing (2007), in which 1,129 Hong Kong people aged over 16 were interviewed, with an almost equal number of males and females. The sample was primarily sourced from a Harris interactive Internet panel. The results of the survey show that only 24 percent of respondent always/almost

always experienced an orgasm, which is the lowest among all 26 participating countries. While 41 percent of males would always experience an orgasm, only 8 percent of females always had orgasm, which was again the lowest among all participating countries. The results also found that women were not comfortable in telling their partners what they like in sex, such as when she feels that she wants to have sex, she would repress such feelings in order to fit into the moral ideal of good womanhood. Among the majority of females in Hong Kong who said they did not enjoy sexual intercourse, a large percentage believed that women were not supposed to have sexual desires as strong as those of males (Durex 2007). This demonstrates that not many women in Hong Kong believe that they have autonomy over their own bodies when it comes to sexuality. Sex is a taboo for “good women”, and fighting for autonomy over one’s sexual desire is something beyond imagination.

In early 2008, this taboo was challenged on a massive scale. Over a period of several weeks starting from January 19, more and more people, including mothers, wives, and “good girls” were talking about sex as a series of obscene photos was released and circulated quickly on the Internet. These were pictures taken by Edison Chen, a male actor-singer in Hong Kong, of his sex partners, many of whom were popular movie stars, singers, and members of the upper class. In the following month, the incident remained the headline in the local media, including Chinese and English newspapers, and television and radio news programs. That Edison Chen’s computer was broken into by the computer technician who was hired to repair it, and that is was clearly a case of theft, was side-stepped. People eagerly consumed the news. At first, they were interested in whether the photos were real. When Chen admitted that he did in fact take those photos, the public started to guess who were the celebrities involved. When more and more photos were being released, people even started to

collect them. Instead of greeting one another with “Hey, how have you been?” Many people started their conversations by asking “Hey, have you seen the photos?”, “Have you got Bobo’s series?”, and “How many pictures have you got?”. The Edison Chen case obviously provided a chance for people to talk about a forbidden topic — sex. Seeing this happening, parents, schools, religious group and many others began to worry. The incident stirred up a huge debate on moral values, and through the popular discourse we can see different social institutions vying for the authority to judge the women that were involved. One of the most controversial values embodied in the debate is females’ sexuality.

In the subsequent debate, the female movie stars involved in this incident were judged by moral representatives such as religious groups, schools and social welfare institutions. Not surprisingly, in a patriarchal society like Hong Kong, the conservative views dominated the discussion. For example, on February 11, *Headline Daily* ran a report on the advice from the Catholic Church asking followers “not to see, not to listen and not to talk about the photos, as obscenity is a sin”. On the same page, the editorial suggested that parents, schools, and the church should work together to advocate and restore the correct values among young people. Different organizations launched different campaigns in response to the incident. Religious groups, parents, schools, and even public figures from the entertainment industry all condemned Edison Chen for his misbehavior despite the fact that he was also a victim of theft in the case. Though the women involved with Edison Chan were criticized for not living up to the social expectations as role models for their fans who were mostly adolescents, the public showed somewhat more pity towards them. For example, Youth Voice Association (頭條 2008: 4) initiated a “respect female artists” campaign, in which they gathered 115 signatures from people aged

5-28, who agreed to stop uploading and passing around these pictures, and to immediately delete the photos upon receiving them. The victimization of the females again reinforced the idea that a sexual scandal was a bigger deal for women than for men.

Edison Chan's case was only one of many incidents that reflected the general population's attitude towards "good" and "bad" sexuality. Before this incident, there had been other events in society which reflected on popular thoughts about virginity and sexuality. For example, church groups would advocate premarital celibacy. On 1 September 2007, 8,000 young Christians gathered to take an oath to refuse premarital sex. Through this event, the organizer wished to remind young people of the importance of virginity (明報 2007: A10). Many secondary schools have published rules that forbid public displays of affection; they also have restrictions on how sex education should be taught. Most hostels in universities have curfews that prohibit the opposite sex from staying overnight. Once in a while, there are young lovers who commit suicide because the girl became pregnant (e.g. The Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups 1995).

However, we cannot jump to the conclusion that Hong Kong people's level of sexual experience is conservative. In February 2008, the Hong Kong Council of Social Service surveyed 1,200 young people (730 males and 470 females) aged between 11 and 18. The percentage of females and males who had had sexual experiences was very similar: 63.6 % males and 61.1% female respondents (altogether 757 informants) had had vaginal sex. Forty-six male and female respondents said that their first voluntary sexual experience happened before the age of twelve. More than half of the informants had their first vaginal sexual experience before the age of 14. About 28.5% of the informants believed that it was okay to

have oral sex, and more than 39.7% of the informants thought that they can accept one night stands. 24% of the respondents accepted commercial sex, and 9.3% have been engaged in some sort of commercial sex. In addition, 11.9% of respondents expressed that they would accept sex involving more than one partner, and 33.6% said that they accept dating with more than one person at a time. Among the 757 respondents who had sexual experience, 528 answered that they had more than one sex partner, and 79 respondents estimated that they had had 10 or more sex partners (The Hong Kong Council of Social Service 2006). When asked about the reasons for having sex, 96 females (over 30 percent) answered that they had no particular reasons. At the same time, 23.8% females (70) had had one, or more than one, abortion experience. It is quite clear from the data presented in the survey that Hong Kong's teenagers were really open both ideologically and in practice. However, they had very little knowledge about sex, and tended to underestimate the negative consequences of unprotected sex.

So why is there such a discrepancy? How can females be so conservative as to think that they should not have the right to enjoy sex even after marriage but at the same time willing to have premarital sex? How can there be a group of teenagers proudly taking an oath refusing premarital sex, while another group of teenagers would have sex casually and think little of the consequences? It is also very interesting to see that while information about sex abounds, the rising rate of unexpected youth pregnancies indicates a lack of basic sexual knowledge. Such a paradoxical phenomenon makes the study of sexuality a very interesting and significant issue in understanding the gender ideology in Hong Kong.

During the summer in 2009, I visited workplaces of female sex-workers in Hong Kong. I came across more than a hundred one-woman brothels in different

district of Hong Kong and had a chance to see what was written at their doors as their “self-introduction”. In other service sectors, service providers’ experience would always be valued. Consider massage centers, beauty centers, salons, etc: the customers would always want a person who was more experienced to serve him or her, rather than preferring a trainee. Practice makes perfect; therefore one’s sexual skills could also be sharpened by experiences. However, the sex workers would never advertise themselves as being “experienced”. They would only use wordings like “providing the best service”¹ or “remarkable skills”². Instead of emphasizing their sexual experience, it was quite common to find self-introductions like “students doing part-time job,”³ “air-hostess occasionally here,”⁴ or “newly arrived beauty”⁵. Such descriptions emphasized that they were new to the sex industry or were just amateurs. These introductions reflect the fact that clients who came for sex would prefer a more inexperienced sex worker and would pay her more generously if she were not a professional. There were also cases in which young female sex workers across the border would undergo hymen-repairing surgeries in order to charge Hong Kong customers a much higher price.

Many of the popular discussion fora in Hong Kong contain an adult section. In these sections, one could always find pornographic fiction. And if one types “virgin” as the keyword, they would be shown a list of fiction in which the girls were being deflowered. Sometimes one would not even need to type the keyword, as “virgin” would automatically come up as one of the biggest categories among all the fictions, showing that virginity is quite a mainstream theme in pornographic fiction. In such

¹ Original words in Chinese 「服務一流」。

² Original words in Chinese 「功夫了得」。

³ Original words in Chinese 「學生妹做兼職」。

⁴ Original words in Chinese 「空姐客串」。

⁵ Original words in Chinese 「新到靚女」。

stories, it is always males having sex with female virgins. The authors would describe clearly how the males know that the girls are virgins, for example by emphasizing the tightness of the vaginal opening, or how the males would feel the membrane, and how they thrust through it eventually, or how the girls would feel that their hymens have been damaged, and most importantly of all, all stories would contain descriptions of the bleeding of the girl upon breaking her hymen. In some of the fiction, when the male (usually a rapist) find out that his target is not a virgin anymore, he would punish her by raping her in a more brutal way. In one of the stories entitled “Female Student of the Red Cross Raped after Footdrill Training”, after the rapist finds out that the victim is not a virgin, he immediately accuses the victim for being promiscuous and asks her how she has lost her first time. When the victim replies by saying she had been raped a few days ago, and that the previous rapist had a premature ejaculation upon entering her vagina, the rapist feels more relieved, because this proves that the victim is not too dirty and too used-up yet.⁶ From all of these stories and the real-life advertisements discussed above, we can see that the more sexual experience a women has, the less preferable she is as a mate for males. Obviously, the sexual experiences of women would lead to depreciation in their value, while virgins would be preferred; hence, virginity is a prized commodity.

Such online fiction also reminds me of a conversation that I had with a male friend who told me that he thought 99% of males wanted their girlfriends to have less sexual experience, rather than wanting a woman with more sexual experience to be their girlfriend. When I asked him why sexual experience was not valued by men, he

⁶ I accessed the link <http://hkg.westkit.net/?p=v&id=2049119> on 11th Jan 2011, in which there was a collection of pornographic fiction about virgin students being raped. By typing keywords from the story and searching again, I found that a lot of other popular fora had the same set of fictions. “Female Student of the Red Cross Raped after her Footdrill Training” was one typical story shared among these for a. Its Chinese title as “紅十字會學生步操後被操”。

replied by saying, “Just imagine if you are buying a bottle of water. Would you want the one that is sealed, or one that has been opened and tasted for one gulp by another man?” Such a comparison between women and goods are frequently used, not only by this man, but by both men and women in the broader society.

Study of Sexuality in Hong Kong

Academic interest in sexuality and gender issues in Hong Kong can be divided into several different approaches. There have been a number of studies that focused on the early wave of female immigrants and women within the patriarchal kinship structure. These started with the tragic history of early women immigrants who were sold as prostitutes, maids and concubines (Jaschok 1998). In these studies, sexuality has never been the main focus; researchers would rather focus on how women became victims of the institutional structure. One example is Rubie Watson’s research from the 1980s, entitled “Wives, Concubines, and Maids: Servitude and Kinship in the Hong Kong Region, 1900–1940” (Watson 2004b), in which Watson pointed out that a woman’s social status depended on her kin status, which could only be acquired through marriage.

Some other academic studies put their focus on the division of labor within the family. Although sex is a crucial element in forming the family unit, not many studies have been conducted on sexuality. Instead, they have focused on how gender is intertwined with the economy. 1975–1985 was proposed by the United Nations as the Decade of Women. Hong Kong society became more concerned with women’s physical health, and a number of research works were done on health problems faced by women, such as the emotional reaction to gynecological surgery (Tang 1985), postnatal emotional adjustment (Leung 1985) and how women have misconceptions

about their body structure. The study of sexuality has mostly been from a biological perspective. Sexuality has been studied “scientifically” from a medical approach. Females in such studies appeared as passive sexual objects of male’s sexual desire. Women were assumed to be more “emotionally dependent”, rather than “having stronger sexual urge” than their male counterparts; therefore women were expected to make more “self-controlled” sexual choices than males.

Researchers also wished to situate sexuality in the context of religion. For example, Emily Ahern pointed out that female sexuality was seen as dangerous and polluting (Ahern 1975). Steven Sangren studied Kuan Yin, Ma Tsu and the Eternal Mother — three commonly worshipped female figures in Chinese popular religion — and concluded that in order to be a Chinese female deity, one must be a virgin (Sangren 1983). Sexual purity enabled their sacredness.

There have also been a number of studies that focused on women as victims of family violence and sexual harassment (see, for example, Longstaff and Lo 1980). In such studies, women’s sexuality was examined as a gender-based issue, and the power relationship between the two genders was addressed. However, such studies have usually been quantitative and used surveys as the major research method, so individual experiences were not carefully examined.

Concerning the status of women, many studies have focused on women’s role in the family structure. For example, James Watson’s work looks at how females have been excluded from religious practices such as ancestor worship (Watson 1982). Another example is Janice Stockard’s study of unwed women of the Canton Delta (Stockard 1989). In the research done by Yip Hon Ming on the *zishunu* of Southern China, Yip points out that the women were able to resist marriage or choose to live separately from the husbands because such practices ensured female virginity, which

coincided with the patriarchal idea that female sexuality must be controlled (葉漢明 1999: 225–285). By promising they would not get married and would maintain their virginity, these women were able to gain a higher degree of acceptance and freedom from their family and community. *Zishunu* also generated an income from their labor and were able to donate money to their home village for different purposes. We can see that the woman's economic capital enabled her to refrain from using her sexual capital, which in turn helped her to gain more economic capital. However, in the above studies, sexuality was treated as an inclusive element of the kinship system and was not discussed.

In recent years, study of sexuality has become more popular. There are a number of surveys done regularly on the sexual behaviors and sexual attitudes in Hong Kong. Different organizations, for example, The Family Planning Association, The Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups, Caritas, and Mother's Choice, have all launched programs to deal with "problems" related to the sexuality of youth, and proposed measures to solve such problems. Academic research on sexuality is not limited to the medical perspective. There is also a multi-disciplinary approach, emphasizing the importance of the social-cultural context. For example: Ho and Tsang's paper on the vagina-clitoris debate examines the naming of the sex organ and reclaiming of the body, exploring new dimensions on the understanding of sexuality, rather than merely adapting Western theories to the Chinese context (Ho and Tsang 2005). Researchers have also begun to put more focus on values, identity and individual experiences of females. For example, Ho has also written a paper on the sexuality of housewives in Hong Kong, in which she pointed out housewives' sexual behavior was in every way at the peak of the sex hierarchy discussed by Gayle Rubin, however this did not grant them respectable status in the society (Ho 2008).

In addition to sexual satisfaction and sexual choice, sexual orientation and sexually transmitted diseases have also all become popular topics of research. For example, there was a study on the needs and risks of women attending STD clinics in Hong Kong (香港婦女中心協會 2006). An M.Phil. thesis was written on the lesbian community in Hong Kong by Lai Yuen-ki, which seeks to find out the relationship between identity and body construction among tomboys in Hong Kong (Lai 2004). There are also studies of male homosexuality. Scholars such as Travis Kong look at the sexual politics of Chinese male sex workers (Kong 2005) and on Chinese male homosexuality (Kong 2011).

Running through the studies of sexualities, it is easy to notice there has not been any research that focuses on the sexuality of single females of different sexual orientations. Thus, I chose single females as my target group, and focused my research on how they deal with their sexuality.

This research aims to understand how a group of single females in Hong Kong view sexuality, and how these views are a result of the interaction between the individual and society. The research will contribute to a deeper understanding of the conventional views of sexuality and gender, and how these relate to the related notions of love, sex, and marriage. An examination of the discourses of sexuality, in particular virginity, will shed light on the social contexts that create such discourses. Secondly, by addressing the question of how and why different people have different attitudes towards sexuality, especially virginity, we may find out how females, as bearers of culture, are being socialized, while at the same time have different sexual choices and justifications of their own.

Over 95% of Hong Kong's population is ethnically Chinese, and Chinese behavioral codes are being followed here, including those that direct people on how

they should behave in terms of sex. In particular, Confucian codes generally forbid the public display of intimacy, even between husband and wife. The purpose of sex is reproduction. During the Han Dynasty, one of the government officials, Zhang Chang (張敞), liked to help his wife with her makeup. Other officials considered this to be immoral and an outlaw act (有違禮法), and reported it to the Emperor Xuan (宣帝). The Emperor himself had been spending a lot of time with women in his palace, yet he asked Zhang why he was behaving in such an immoral way (趙元信, 何錫蓉 1993: 130). It is not difficult to understand why Zhang was considered to be immoral. First of all, what he did with his wife was an expression of intimacy, but was not procreative. Secondly, Zhang's display of affection suggested that he might also display the same affection while having sex, his wife in return might have sexual enjoyment, which could not be tolerated. This reflected the view that wives existed to serve their husbands in terms of sexual relationships; their own feelings of enjoyment should be ignored and suppressed, because females' sexuality should be controlled by males.

Throughout history, methods have been devised to certify whether or not a woman is a virgin. The earliest recorded method of testifying if a woman was a virgin was written in a medical book called *Method of Longevity* (養生方). The book was excavated from Ma Wang Dui, a Han Tomb. The method was as follows: "Get lizards, and put them in a pot. Feed them with red sand until they die. Grind them into a powder. Put a dot [of this powder] on the female's arm. If she had intercourse with men, the dot will disappear⁷ (王威 2002). In some places in China, there were

⁷Original words in Chinese 「取守宮置新甕中，而置丹（於）甕中，令守宮食之。須死，即治，」
「卽畫女子臂若身。即與男子戲，即不明。」

practices called “shou jin”⁸, which could be literally translated as giving somebody a piece of cloth. It is to be performed on the wedding night. A piece of white cloth would be given to the groom; it would be placed on the bed beneath the bride, to collect the blood of the bride when her hymen broke during her first intercourse. The groom would need to show his friends and relatives the next day the same piece of cloth to prove that his wife was a virgin. If there were no blood on the cloth, they could send the bride back to her natal family and declare the marriage null and void (趙元信, 何錫蓉 1993: 130-131). There was a case in the Qing Dynasty in which a groom found the bride to be very ugly, and he tried to get out of the marriage by claiming the bride was not a virgin. The bride’s sister-in-law knew that the bride was a virgin, and learnt that the couple did not have intercourse at all. She told the bride’s father about this, and the father brought the case to court. After examining and making sure that the bride was still a virgin, the court ordered the groom to accept the bride immediately (趙元信, 何錫蓉 1993: 166-167).

During the Ming and the Qing Dynasties, doctrines that taught how a woman should behave after marriage were very popular, and there were practices to make sure only a woman’s husband could enjoy her sexual capital. Under the influence of such doctrines, people had ideas like “it is better for a woman to die of hunger than to lose her chastity” (餓死事小, 失節事大) and they built “monumental archways for chastity” (貞潔牌坊) to show recognition of women who behaved properly in the realm of sexuality (章義和 1997). After British colonization, the marriage law in Hong Kong still allowed polygyny. A man was allowed to have multiple wives, but a woman’s sexuality should only be possessed by her husband. Even when monogamy was implemented in 1971, the legacy of polygyny was still in force, as studies have

⁸ Original words in Chinese 「授巾。」

shown that many Hong Kong men are taking mainland mistresses (譚少薇 2007). This shows that a woman's sex is inclusively owned by her husband, but not the other way round.

In Hong Kong, however, people believe that the city's colonial history has made it more westernized and more open-minded as compared to other Chinese societies. Therefore, it would be interesting to see if such assumptions of open-mindedness also apply to female sexuality.

We must first ask: is the western view really more open-minded than the Chinese view on female sexuality? Ann Oakley, in defining sexuality, points out that in Victorian times, a large group of western females were denied their sexuality altogether. "The Victorian lady was not supposed to have sexual desire, hence her paradoxical status as a sexual object for the man's satisfaction" (Oakley 1996: 175). It seems that in the West, females were also assumed to be sexual objects of males, and female sexuality was sanctioned in similar ways to that in Chinese culture. Oakley suggests that even today, "The female's sexuality is supposed to lie in her receptiveness, and this is not just a matter of her open vagina: it extends to the whole structure of feminine personality as dependent, passive, unaggressive and submissive. Female sexuality has been held to involve romantic idealism rather than lustful reality" (Oakley 1996: 176). Or as Vance has said, "Women become the moral custodians of male behavior, which they are perceived as instigating and eliciting. Women inherit a substantial task: the management of their own sexual desire and its public expression. Self-control and watchfulness become major and necessary female virtues." (Vance 1984: 4)

Anthropological Theories for Understanding Sexuality

Different anthropological theories have been applied in the past to analyze sexuality. Mead emphasizes the importance of cultural constructs of sexuality. For example, she finds that the Arapesh would not fear that their girls would be the sexual objects of males, and would not treat them with extra protection because in Arapesh society, sex was defined as a “response to an external stimulus rather than as spontaneous desire, [and hence] both men and women are regarded as helpless in the face of seduction”. (Mead 1935) Mead reinforces the idea that sexuality was culturally constructed in her famous research on the coming of age in Samoa. (Mead 1965)

In contrast to Mead’s analysis, another approach to sexuality is the sociobiologists’ explanation. Sociobiology, as the “systematic study of the biological basis of all social behavior” (Wilson 1975: 4), hypothesizes that the different biological structure of the body has put females and males in an unequal position. Instead of thinking everything is culturally constructed, sociobiologists add a biological perspective in analyzing social phenomena. In studying sexuality, the advantage of applying sociobiology is that it can prevent researchers from making mistakes of depending on cultural knowledge too much and being cheated by their informants when she was studying the adolescents’ behavior in Samoa. However, the drawback is that when such theories are applied to explain gender norms, people tend to emphasize the biological fact and neglect the importance of culture. For example, by emphasizing different physical consequences of sexual behaviors for the two sexes, sociobiology indirectly reinforces the correlation between sex and reproduction, and legitimizes women’s more reserved sexual attitude, which in turn might provide justification for the unfair double standards acting on men and women.

For example, Liu and Hu, in their book *Da Nan Nu* (2009), argue that females

have the hymen as an indicator of their status of virginity, and can get pregnant, thus they would be more careful in selecting sexual partners and would hold a more cautious attitude towards sexual relationships. Moreover, the concept of virginity has also evolved from the ancient practice of killing the first child for biological reasons. Since a man cannot be sure if his wife has had sex previously with other men, he would kill the first child so as to ensure the child he raises would be his own child (劉達臨, 胡宏霞 2009: 65–66). The theory behind this interpretation is the selfish gene theory proposed by sociobiologists.

Still, the body is not only biological; it is also a socio-cultural phenomenon. In *A History of Sexuality* (1984), Foucault questions why we think males are erotic while females are not, and why we accept men's sexual possessiveness as some sort of right but do not claim the same right for women. He argues that we believe in certain knowledge because they are given to us by powerful social institutions. In a Foucauldian sense, all knowledge involves oppression. We cannot say whose interpretation of female sexuality is more correct than others, as there is no objective truth but only the more powerful thus more predominant voice. For example, how would we know what degree of sexual urges is normal, and what degree of sexual urges is abnormal? These measurements of normality and abnormality are just means to categorize people as well as to control them by comparing them with the norm (Foucault 1984).

Foucault's theory can be used to explain why Hong Kong women hold a more conservative attitude towards sex. However, it cannot explain why in some cases there is a mismatch in ideology and practice; neither can it explain why some women choose to repress their sexual urges even though they believe that women also have sexual urges.

In the Foucauldian perspective, the attitude of sex can only be formed top-down, that is, from society to individuals, and individuals can only be docile bodies shaped by social institutions, rather than having any power to influence the social structure. Rubin discusses a good-bad differentiation of sex in her work *Thinking Sex* (Rubin 1998), in which sex can be categorized and ranked into “good sex”, which is considered normal sexuality, and “bad sex”, which is sexuality to be condemned. She finds that only a small portion of human sexual capacity is defined as safe, healthy, mature, legal and politically correct. Not only is there the differentiation between good and bad sex, there is also a ranking of sexuality. At the top of this hierarchy are the types of sex that are heterosexual, married, monogamous, reproductive, non-commercial, carried out within the same generation, and happen at home (Rubin 1998: 107). At the bottom of the hierarchy, there are all sorts of sexualities that are considered abnormal, such as pedophilia, necrophilia and incest. According to Rubin, only individuals whose behavior stands high on this hierarchy are rewarded with certified mental health, respectability and legality. This theory of sexual hierarchy coincides with the moral ideal towards sexuality in Hong Kong. However, when we look at sexuality at an individual level instead of asking for general opinion, we can see that the sex pyramid for different persons can be very different — “good sex” for one woman may not necessarily be “good” for another. Rubin’s idea of a sex hierarchy is useful, yet it has over-simplified the issue by over-emphasizing the universality in people’s ranking of sexuality.

In *The Semantic of Biology: Virginity*, Kirsten Hastrup studies the meaning of virginity, and finds that “we have to know the meaning of virginity in relation to a larger social whole, and in relation to the evaluation attached to different stages of a woman’s life” (Hastrup 1978: 50). Women at different stages of life see virginity

differently. Such difference can be explained by Goffman's idea. Goffman believes that "there [is] no such thing as self apart from the social roles;" thus when we are in the process of social interaction, we are always performing according to our social roles and seek to present a flattering self-image to others. Goffman further argues that individuals act in certain ways consciously in order to control how others see them. Since we are always in the process of social interaction, we are always performing according to our social roles and seek to present a certain self-image to others (Goffman 1959).

Thus, some people would consider virginity important while others would not because they want to present different self-images. Similarly, the same woman would consider virginity as something important in some cases but not in other situations, because she wishes to present different self-images to different people.

Goffman's idea helps to explain the variation of sex attitudes among different women; it also helps to elicit what social roles require a woman to behave, for example, in a more reserved way. However, the problem of Goffman's theory is that individual agency is still not being addressed; females still act according to social roles, and the changes of sexual attitudes cannot be explained.

We sometimes believe in certain concepts of sexuality not only because different institutions in the society teach us so; individuals' actions also have an effect on society. That is to say, as individuals, we shape the society that shapes us. We believe in what society tells us, but on the other hand, our beliefs also affect what society tells us. In the process of core values formation, there is a two-way interaction between individuals and their society. This fits into Bourdieu's theory of "habitus".

Bourdieu defines habitus as a system of durable, transposable dispositions, or structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures (Bourdieu 1977: 72). This theory can be a better explanation for the changing attitudes towards sex. It emphasizes the dynamic interaction between structure and individual, and would better address individual's agency and their interpretation of sexuality.

Theorists have defined and discussed patriarchy differently. One of the more influential schools is Marxist feminism, which argues that patriarchy is rooted in the economic oppression of men against women who have been confined in the family. Social feminists, like Heidi Hartmann, however, believe that patriarchy is "a set of social relations between men, which have a material base, and which through, hierarchical [relations], establish or create interdependence and solidarity among men that enable them to dominate women. Though patriarchy is hierarchical and men of different classes, races, or ethnic groups have different places in the patriarchy, they are also united in their shared relationship of dominance over their women." (Hartmann 2003: 211) This means that patriarchy is formed because some men are always able to have control over their women. This is not only acquired through economic oppression, but also on ideological level. Hartmann argues that men not only maintain their control over women by controlling their labor, but they do so by restricting their sexuality as well. The control of female sexuality thus has long been used as a method to maintain a patriarchy society. Along this line, my research discusses how patriarchy has survived in contemporary Hong Kong society. By focusing on how my informants interpret love, sex and marriage, we can see how female ideas of sexuality are being shaped by the modern form of patriarchy — a pervasive form that is not only maintained at the material level, but also at the social and ideological levels.

Methodology

In-depth interviews

Data for the study was collected mostly through in-depth interviews with single females from different socio-economic backgrounds. I interviewed 18 females of ages 23 to 56. With the median age at first marriage of females being 28 (The Census and Statistics Department 2007: 31), 23–33 is the age range when most women get married. Age 23 is when women's sexuality become a controversial issue, as they are adults and should have control over their sexuality, but morally they are not allowed to have sex if they are not married. I wanted to see how this group of female deals with sexuality, and the explanations they give for choosing certain attitudes. If a female is not married, people expect her to be a virgin; however, if a female has passed the prime age of marriage, even though she is not married, people do not expect her to be a virgin. Thus, in addition to the relatively young females, I also interviewed a few single females in their forties or fifties who have passed the “prime” age of marriage.

Although it was easy to get people to talk about their views on sexuality, it is difficult to get people to talk about their personal sexual experiences. Convenience sampling and snowball sampling were used as my major sampling methods, and I interviewed everybody I could find. It is true that my informants were slightly more educated than average. In addition, the proportion of homosexuals was also high. However, the sample covers a wide spectrum of ages, educational levels, sexual orientations, and family and religious backgrounds. I hope that by presenting the views of the informants, I will shed light on the complexity of sexual choices of females and how this reflects different aspects of Hong Kong society.

Before I go into the discussion, I would first of all introduce my informants’

background in the table below.

Table 1.1 In-depth Interview Informants

Informants (pseudonyms)	Age	Education	Religion	Sexual Orientation
Nga Wun	23	Associate Degree	None	Heterosexual
Coco	25	Doing a Master’s Degree	None	Homosexual
Flora	25	Bachelor’s Degree	None	Heterosexual
Viva	25	Doing a Master’s Degree	Buddhist	Homosexual
Yoyo	25	Bachelor’s Degree	None	Homosexual
Ah Kwan	26	Form Five	None	Heterosexual
Ah On	26	Form Five	None	Heterosexual
Keikei	26	Higher Diploma	None	Homosexual
Ah Mei	27	Master’s Degree	Christian	Heterosexual
April	27	Master’s Degree	Buddhist	Heterosexual
Celine	27	Master’s Degree	Christian	Heterosexual
Ah Wing	28	Master’s Degree	Christian	Heterosexual (had previous homosexual relationships)
Gigi	29	Bachelor’s Degree	None	Heterosexual
Soso	31	Bachelor’s Degree	Christian	Homosexual
Daisy	38	Tertiary education (incomplete)	None	Heterosexual
Elaine	40	Bachelor’s Degree	Previously Christian	Homosexual
Chris	42	Master’s Degree	Christian	Heterosexual
Ah Fen	56	Form Five	None	Heterosexual

Among the 18 informants, six of them were Christians, including one who had been a Christian before breaking up with her Christian ex-girlfriend. Two of my informants were Buddhists, including one who subscribed to Buddhist ideas but

chose not to follow Buddhist rituals. The rest of the informants claimed they had no religion.

Regarding the educational level of my informants, five of them have received a master's degree, two of them were doing a master's degree, five had a bachelor's degree, while three of them had received different forms of tertiary education, including one doing an associate degree, one who had finished the higher diploma, and one who had attended some sort of tertiary education but quit the program because of health reasons. The rest of my informants had finished secondary education.

Regarding the sexual orientation of my informants, six of them identified themselves as homosexuals, one identified herself as heterosexual but admitted her homosexual experience. The rest identified themselves as heterosexuals.

All interviews were conducted between 2008 and 2009. Each interview lasted for about 1.5 to 2 hours and took place in cafés or the informants' offices, at the informants' homes, or in my student hostel. The interviews were all conducted in Cantonese, although some informants used English terms in expressing their ideas. A set of the core questions which were asked and an interview protocol are enclosed in the appendix.

Content analysis

Content analysis was used as a supplementary method of data collection. In Hong Kong, there are many tabloids and magazines which tend to pander to the taste of their readers, and their comments usually coincide with the view of the general public. I looked through the content of these popular print media sources and used these as an indicator of what was considered acceptable and appropriate gender

behavior.

With the case of Edison Chen's obscene photos making the headlines in many newspapers for over two weeks, different groups in society launched programs, organized press conferences and expressed their views on sexuality. This massive numbers of reports constituted a body of information on sex attitudes in Hong Kong. Such materials would be very useful in reflecting general opinions towards sex and was used to provide the social context.

Structure of the Thesis

In the following chapters of my thesis, I will categorize my informants into three groups based on their attitudes and sexual experiences. They are the "moralists", the "mainstreams", and the "radicals". In Chapter Two, I will focus on my "moralist" informants and discuss how they interpret love, sex and marriage, and how such interpretations served to enable them to live up to moral ideals, and contributed to their virgin status.

In Chapter Three, I will discuss the cases in the mainstreams group, who seemed to be doing what the majority of society was doing. I wish to describe the justifications they provided for their behaviors, and to discuss the major factors affecting their choices related to sex.

In Chapter Four, I will show the readers the cases of my "radical" informants, who challenge the idea that sex is always associated with morality. I will analyze how they make sense of their lives by differentiating themselves from the mundane public through establishing a special cultural capital.

In the concluding chapter, I will put the views of all the three groups of informants together, and contrast them to other stories that I collected from people

other than my key informants. I will provide an explanation for why different interpretations of sexuality and virginity existed, how this reflected the changes and continuities of sexual norms in Hong Kong, and how these reflect the changes and continuity of ideas of patriarchies.

Chapter 2 The Moralists

“The purpose of sex is not to relieve sexual urges; otherwise, how is man different from other animals?” Chris, 42, pastor.

Introduction

In this chapter, I will discuss five cases among my informants who had certain insistence on the concept of virginity, and were not engaged in any kind of sexual behavior. They fit well into the most ideologically correct norms in terms of their sexuality, and thus I call them the “moralists”. They have worked hard to adhere to “traditional” ideas about female sexuality, and they agreed to ideological doctrines and carried out the norms in practice.

As discussed in the Introduction, sex is always political. Sexuality is formulated by gender ideology, which is entwined with economics, education, marriage system, kinship structure, social policy. Sexuality in Hong Kong is a highly contested topic, and in the following sections I am going to show how erotic life is constantly renegotiated among different groups of females. I will show how my “moralist” informants understood love, marriage and sex; how they justified their behavior by restating the importance of morality; and what gender concepts have been influencing their value system.

According to Gale Rubin’s concept of the sex hierarchy, only limited forms of sex were acceptable: sex should be heterosexual, within the context of marriage, for the purpose of reproduction, rather than for enjoyment of sexual pleasure (Rubin 1998). This hierarchy of sex basically coincides with what my “moralist” informants

believed in. In Hong Kong, there are different social institutions trying to influence people's idea on sexuality. For example, Christian churches tell people that premarital sex is a sin, the family tells people it is shameful to have an unwed pregnant daughter, and the school teaches sex from a scientific perspective of reproduction, rather than teaching students how to enjoy sexual pleasure. A set of unspoken, yet rigid standards has been set up through the process of socialization, and is used to differentiate what is and is not appropriate sexual behavior. However, at the same time, one cannot avoid seeing sex because it is everywhere in the media. This is not to mention the pornographic material that is easily accessible from the Internet; we see sex even when we do not actively search for it. Romance is the key element in almost every soap opera drama broadcast during prime time in the two Chinese free-to-air television channels, where sex is incorporated into the plot. Sexual scenes could also be found in movies and in printed media. In many of the magazines targeting female customers, such as *Cosmopolitan*, *Jessica* and *Marie Claire*, a section on sexuality is included in every issue. Topics such as sexual positions, sexual skills, frequently encountered sex-related problems and attitudes towards different sexual practices have been discussed. Sex is presented as a mysterious, but normal thing, and females are told repeatedly that sex could be enjoyable.

Like the action and reaction pair, when certain behaviors are classified as the standard, other behaviors become the non-standard or are seen as challenging the standard. A dichotomy is clearly set up: the "old", "traditional", "Chinese" idea as the standard, versus the "new", "modern", "Western" view. Women can be divided into two groups in accordance with the dichotomy. We can see that, in popular discourse, women are either being described as "traditional good girls" (傳統乖乖女)

or “open”(開放) girls who “have the character of a Westerner” (鬼妹仔性格).

In Hong Kong, the conventional ideology on sexuality requires people to have sex only within the context of marriage. This is especially true for women. Throughout the socialization process, unmarried women in Hong Kong are constantly reminded that a good woman should not lose her virginity before marriage. Although this view is the norm, it is considered “traditional” and might even be seen as “repressive” to some people. Thus, following such norms is not an easy job at all. People following such norms are always being associated with all sorts of negative adjectives. Two of the most popular terms used to describe such people are “*lou5 chy2 neu5*”⁹ and “*lou5 gul po4*”¹⁰. The former can be literally translated as “old virgins” and the latter means “old unwed women”. Both of these terms carry an implication that no man would want these women. Starting from 2009, several newly coined terms started to appear in the local press and in the daily life of Hong Kong people. They are: “*jung1 neu5*”¹¹, “*suk6 neu5*”¹² and “*sing6 neu5*”¹³. The first one, “*jung1 neu5*” means middle [aged] women, and it is often used to refer to females who have passed their twenties. In the second term, “*suk6*” literally means a ripen stage, so it can be used to describe mature women. Although mature seems to be a positive adjective, females do not like to be called “*suk6 neu5*”. This is because the next stage after ripening is rotting. A “*suk6 neu5*” is facing the danger of being rotten (getting old) and will soon be unwanted (by males). The third term is “*sing6 neu5*”. This term is most the explicit among the three newly coined terms. The word “*sing6*” literally means leftovers. Similar to leftover food, leftover women are single

⁹ 老處女。

¹⁰ 老姑婆。

¹¹ 中女。

¹² 熟女。

¹³ 剩女。

women who are not chosen by men. The two prerequisites for the term “*sing6 neu5*” to stand are first of all: women are commodities, and secondly, women are to be chosen by men. Therefore, a woman’s value is based on the man who has chosen her. In 2010, two celebrities were described as “*sing6 neu5*”: Joey Yung and Miriam Yeung, both of whom are locally born and bred women singers. After learning that she was being described as a “*sing6 neu5*”, Yung said to the reporter, “How can that be, I haven’t broken my seal!” The press then interpreted her words as, “Joey Young said that she was a virgin,” implying that she was just telling a joke. Another piece of news in relation to “*sing6 neu5*” was Mariam Yeung’s marriage. The press quoted one of Yeung’s bosses describing her as a typical “*sing6 neu5*”, saying that “Yeung being able to get married is bringing hope to thousands of “*sing6 neu5*” in Hong Kong”¹⁴ (頭條 2010). While most of the women in my sample have had different kinds of premarital sexual experiences and were beginning to think that virginity was not important, there were five informants who adhered to traditions of not having premarital sex.

My “moralist” informants

There are five informants who fall into the “moralist” category. The table below shows their socioeconomic characteristics.

Table 2.1 “Moralist” Informants

Informant (pseudonyms)	Age	Education	Religion	Sexual Orientation
Ah Kwan	26	Form Five	None	Heterosexual

¹⁴ “佢系剩女代表，現在搵到老公，令社會有更多正能量”

Ah On	26	Form Five	None	Heterosexual
Ah Mei	27	Master's Degree	Christian	Heterosexual
Chris	42	Master's degree	Christian	Heterosexual
Ah Fen	56	Form Five	None	Heterosexual

The first informant I interviewed among this group was Ah Mei. She was 27, and a master's degree student. She became a Christian when she was around 20. She lived in private housing with her parents and her younger sister. Before I interviewed her, she was worried about whether or not she would be the right informant for me. This is because she moved to Hong Kong from mainland China when she was ten, and she thought that her ideas could not represent a typical Hong Kong person's view. More importantly, she thought that if the interview was to be about sex, she would have really very little to talk about, because she was so inexperienced in this field.

My second informant was Ah Fen, who was 56, a Form Five graduate and did not believe in any religion. She was born and educated in Hong Kong, and she had been working in the Hong Kong Government as a civil servant for more than three decades. She had 10 siblings, all of whom were married. She lived with her mother.

The third informant I interviewed was Ah Kwan. Ah Kwan was 26, a Form Five graduate, and not a believer of any religion. She was born and educated in Hong Kong. After her graduation, she had worked as a clerk, then as a salesperson, and by the time I interviewed her, she was working in a logistics company. She had one younger brother and one younger sister. She was living with her family in public housing.

The fourth informant I interviewed was Ah On. Like Ah Kwan, she was 26, a Form Five graduate, without any religious belief. She was also born and educated in

Hong Kong. After her gradation, Ah On worked as a clerk in a government department for several years. She continued her career in the civil service and worked for government libraries. Ah On had two younger brothers. Like Ah Kwan, she was also living in public housing with her parents and siblings.

Chris was the last informant of this group. She was a pastor and was 42 when I interviewed her. She proudly announced that she was still a virgin and thought that being single was the unique path that God had planned for her, so she happily accepted it. She was born and educated in Hong Kong up until the undergraduate level; afterwards she worked for a few years in Hong Kong and then went to the United States to study for a master's degree in theology. Chris came from a family with a relatively complicated background. She had eight siblings; many of them were half-brothers or sisters. Chris described her mother as having a "traumatic life": her mom met her first husband; they fell in love, got married and gave birth to their first daughter — Chris's half-sister. However the man passed away from a disease soon after their daughter's birth. Chris's mother was in her early twenties by the time her first husband passed away. Getting married again seemed to be a better choice than staying widowed for the rest of her life. She married her second husband and gave birth to a boy and a girl. While she was bearing Chris, her new husband also died suddenly. Chris's mother was then blamed for bringing bad luck and affecting the fate of her husbands. Chris's mother did not know how to support herself, and had thought of committing suicide; however, for the sake of her children, she held herself back and got married to a business partner of her second husband. Later on, she gave birth to three baby girls and one baby boy. Actually, in the third marriage, Chris's mother did not know very well the person she was going to marry; however, it seemed to be her only choice. Fearing that the husband might treat her children badly,

Chris was sent to her grandparents' place and was fostered by her grandfather and two grandmothers. After she became economically independent, Chris moved out and lived with her younger half-sister.

In the following section, I am going to discuss how the above informants understand love, marriage and sex and how this contributed to their present status of virginity. For all of them, falling in love with a person and getting married with him/her, then having sex with him/her, is not only the preferred sequence for heterosexual couples, but also the most moral and ethical choice.

Because my "moralist" informants were embarrassed to talk about sex, and denied having sexual desires, they do not talk about sexuality directly. Sex comes out in social terms. Love was sometimes used to connote desires for sex, and marriage was a metaphor of sex.

Love

Good students and dutiful daughters

Among the five informants in this group, Ah Kwan was the only person engaged in a romantic relationship. Ah Kwan met her first boyfriend in a friend's wedding when she was 23. When I interviewed her, she was in a very stable relationship with her second boyfriend. She received secondary education in a co-educational school, but unlike most of her schoolmates, she was very serious in treating her relationship with the opposite sex. She deliberately kept a distance as she told me "our conversations (with the opposite sex) are only limited to homework and school activities."

While Ah Kwan was in Form Two, she met a girl who was involved in various romantic relationships with the opposite sex, relationships which Ah Kwan described

as “so complicated”:

There were some problems with the girl’s family. Her father had two wives, because his father also had two wives. Her father was working in the construction business, and always invited his relatives from the mainland to Hong Kong to work for him. The girl told me that when she was in Form One, she was raped by one of those uncles who came to work for her father, but we know that, actually, she and that uncle were secretly having a romantic relationship. In the summer vacation, the uncle went back to the mainland and got married. When she knew that her uncle was married to a woman older than herself, she cried for three days. In Form Two, she became a librarian in our school in order to date a senior student who was also a librarian; however she knew that her parents would not allow her to do so, so she had to do everything very secretly to avoid being found out by her parents. I don’t want my life to get so complicated.

Ah Kwan added that, in the end, the girl nearly broke down emotionally because she could not handle her relationships well. Ah Kwan thought that she was already very busy with schoolwork and extra-curricular activities, and it would take too much effort to start a romantic relationship. In addition to that, she did not want anything that happened to the girl to happen to her. Thus, she felt that she had to set some rules for herself. That meant no dating while studying.

Ah Kwan set this rule of “no dating while studying” not only for herself but also as a promise to her mother. This was because she would not want her mother to worry about her. She said,

For example, if something out of your expectation were to happen, not to mention physically — such as unexpected pregnancy due to sexual

relationship — you wouldn't be able to know how to deal with emotional ups and downs ... As the eldest daughter in the family, I could not let my family worry about me. They have to take care of my younger sister and brother.

From this claim, we can see that Ah Kwan not only tried to be a good student, she also wished to present the image of a dutiful daughter.

Similarly, Ah Mei also tried to convince me that she had restrained from dating in order to perform her social roles as a good student, and was therefore a good daughter. As I mentioned in the informants' background, Ah Mei came to Hong Kong when she was ten. She knew that her parents were worried about her academic performance. They were worried that she could not catch up with her studies, especially in the English subject, because she started to learn English only after she had come to Hong Kong. "I didn't want my parents to worry about me," said Ah Mei, so she put all her effort in her studies. In secondary school, her parents were not on very good terms, so she worked even harder in school, hoping that they would be made happier because of her excellent academic results. She devoted all her time to study; she even trained herself to finish lunch within five minutes, so that she could go to study right after. She pushed herself very hard and was not engaged in any romantic relationships; she did everything to get her family's recognition. She succeeded because her parents were proud of her academic results. Like Ah Kwan, who was the eldest child in the family, Ah Mei also mentioned that she should not let her parents worry about her due to her unique position of being the first child. Ah Kwan mentioned that, as the first child, she should do her best not to add any burden to her parents, but rather should assist them in bringing up the younger children. Although Ah Mei did not feel that she had any responsibility to help her parents bring up her younger siblings, she agreed that she needed to provide a good role

model that her younger sister would be able to follow.

In contrast, Ah On did not consciously keep a distance from the opposite sex, but she claimed that she was very insensitive in taking cues from the opposite sex. She told me that in secondary school, her friends always told her someone was after her, but she did not believe it was the case. After she graduated, and after everything was over, that person confessed to her that he had liked her. But Ah On admitted that right at that point, she was not able to sense anything. “Somehow I was insulated,” Ah On claimed. However, it seems that she deliberately “insulated” herself, as she knew that her family would not allow her to have a romantic relationship. This “self-insulation” could be interpreted as obedience towards her parents.

As the eldest daughter in the family, Ah On’s family members had high expectations of her. She recounted,

During puberty, my parents didn’t allow me to go out. So, I stayed at home. At that time, they might be afraid that I would pick up bad habits such as smoking or drinking. Actually, as the eldest daughter, I knew what my duties were, and I knew that I would not turn out to be a bad girl.

From this, we can see that Ah On did not willingly give up her chance of romantic relationships as Ah Kwan did; rather, she passively accepted such an arrangement.

Ah On thought that she had lost her desire for a romantic relationship when she turned 18. From her interview, I felt that Ah On was a little bit resentful towards her parents. She thought that they were unnecessarily strict in controlling her while she was in secondary school. After Ah On turned 18, her parents, especially her father, started to ask her to go out. He would ask, “Don’t you have anywhere to go for the holiday?” when he saw Ah On staying home. Ah On knew that her father wanted her

to go out on her days off, in the hope that she would meet some friends of the opposite sex. Ah On would reply by saying, "Where do you want me to go then?" She believed that she had lost her curiosity in dating boys, and she concluded her present status as, "Now, I feel I am too old for starting a romantic relationship, and my father urged me less frequently these two years." This resentfulness towards her parents did not make Ah On a bad girl, as indeed this made her an even better daughter, for she had been a victim of the wrong instructions that her parents had given her. She knew that those rules were unnecessary, yet she obeyed them. She had sacrificed her own chance of dating somebody in order to be a dutiful eldest daughter of the family.

Ah Fen said that there were some boys who liked her, but she found that while it was nice to befriend them, when they wanted to be her boyfriend, it became a totally different story. Ah Fen confessed that she might be a perfectionist when it came to choosing her future partner.

I would go out with those boys once or twice, but usually, very soon I found them unsuitable for me, so I refused to go out more, and refused to spend their money.

After she became a civil servant, she found that most of her male colleagues were very nice and were qualified to be her boyfriends. However these nice guys were all married by the time they started the government job. She felt that she could not destroy the well-being of others' families. After her father passed away, Ah Fen knew that there had to be someone to take care of her mother. As all her siblings were married and had to take care of their own families, she thought that remaining single was an ideal arrangement for her and her mother. She was content with her status quo and she enjoyed living with her mother:

We can look after each other. She (her mother) is over eighty, but she still does the cooking. She knows what kind of vegetables are in season, and she knows how to choose an orange.

Ah Fen felt happy about her situation because she thought that she had been doing the right thing for the family. Unlike other parents who would urge their children to get married, for whom staying single would be considered unfilial, in Ah Fen's case, her mother would not urge her to get married because nine of her ten children were already married, and considering her mother's age, she needed someone to take care of her.

In traditional Chinese society, a female's status is always associated with the male she is attached to. A woman would be addressed as someone's daughter before marriage, and someone's wife after marriage (Watson 2004a). Therefore, if a woman is single, she needs to be a good daughter in order to be socially recognized as good, and if she is married, she needs to be a good wife. That is why Ah Kwan, Ah Mei, and Ah On all tried to perform the role of good daughters when they were in secondary school. Ah Fen was able to justify her single status with the fact that she needed to live with and look after her elderly mother. We can see that for Ah Fen, filial piety was held in high esteem.

Throughout Chinese history, women who wished to have a public life or had ambitions were criticized. For example, Hinsch argues that "the ideology for countering powerful women had fully emerged since the Han Dynasty and continued to be used as a mainstay of Chinese political discourse until the end of the imperial era" (Hinsch 2006). In Ko's study of how "talent", "virtue" and "beauty" are related to womanhood in the seventeenth century, she once again highlights the pervasive

ideology that “a woman who lacks talent is virtuous”¹⁵ (Ko 1994). We can see that in traditional Chinese society, females could not have a public life. A good daughter should be someone who was filial to her parents. Good results in studies were never a necessary requirement. However, this is not the case in Hong Kong at the present time. With a significant percentage of women joining the labor force, a dutiful daughter is expected to go to work and bring an income home. Since academic results are directly related with chances of enjoying good employment opportunities, a good daughter now needs to study hard. While in the past a daughter who was unable to get married would be considered a burden for the family, today a daughter would be considered as a burden if she were unable to get married and/or unable to find a job. This is why study was so important for Ah Kwan that she felt she should not let dating affect her studies.

From the above cases, we can see that filial piety is still being held in high esteem, although education is becoming an increasingly important component in it.

Religion

Chris studied in a girls' secondary school, and there was not much chance for her to mingle with the opposite sex, so she “naturally” did not date anyone during her secondary school life. Chris met her first boyfriend at university. Strongly influenced by her religious beliefs, she thought that only marriage within Christ could be full of love; she believed that all sorts of problems could arise in other sorts of marriages. She believed that bonding between the couple could be strengthened with the help of God, and all problems would be solved. Thus she would only date boys who were also Christians. All of her past boyfriends were Christians, and she described them as

¹⁵ Original words in Chinese 「女子無才便是德」

very simple and very nice people. As Chris' ex-boyfriends were Christians who shared similar attitudes towards sex, she did not engage in sex with any of them. Chris put her faith in Jesus Christ, like other Christians, and believed that God had created another half for her, so that their souls would become complete when they met each other. While Chris was in her late twenties to late thirties, she was frustrated that she was unable to find the right guy. However, later on she realized that staying single might be the path designed for her by God. After realizing the unique role that God has designed for her, she became content and happy to be single.

Choosing a boyfriend

My informants also believed that love needed to be long-lasting. For my moral informants, dating was a very serious matter. They would not take the first step to date someone unless they were quite sure that they would be willing to spend their entire life with that person.

Several informants expected that the person whom they dated would eventually marry them. For example, Ah On said that she expected her romantic relationship to be solid, serious and happy forever. "I've seen friends and my brothers dating and breaking up frequently. That hurts. I hope the one I date is the one I will marry." Ah Mei also said that her boyfriend must be willing to marry her; he should have marriage in mind while dating her. Chris said that she tried not to think of marriage when she dated her boyfriends, because the consequence of marriage on her mother was a tragic one; however she dated only Christians because she would only be willing to marry Christians. From this, we can see that unconsciously, Chris still had marriage on her mind while choosing her boyfriends.

Ah Kwan's first boyfriend was the photographer in her friend's wedding. They talked on the phone and ate out, but later on, she found that they seemed to be living in different worlds. She thought that his life was too unstable and irregular, and he would not care how she felt. They stayed together for around half a year, and separated gradually as they contacted each other less and less. Ah Kwan thought that when she knew what kind of person he was, she already felt he was not the right person for her. "He could not provide the security that a girl needed." So she knew they would break up one day. The relationship lasted for around half a year, and was already longer than she expected. She believed that neither party was very involved in the relationship, and breaking up did not hurt much.

We can see that in Ah Kwan's case, "security" was an essential condition for a romantic relationship. And this "security" was an emotional one. Ah Kwan elaborated on the meaning of "security" as "he gives you a feeling that he would like to be with you forever, whatever happens." Apart from emotional security, Ah Kwan thought that her boyfriend must treat his own family members well, and he must also "respect [her] and [her] family members" and "cannot be too stupid", which means that he should be able to take hints, and know what people were trying to say. She thought that her current boyfriend was "qualified" in all of these ways, and that was why they had been together for two years.

My other informants also shared some of these views. Ah Fen thought that her boyfriend must love her and love her family, and she would love him and his family too. He must not smoke, drink, gamble, or go to prostitutes¹⁶. At the same time, he must be physically healthy and inspiring. It would be better if he did not have any girlfriends previously, or if he had been married earlier, his wife should have died, so

¹⁶ Original words in Chinese 「不煙不酒不嫖不賭」

that he would focus on the monogamous relationship with her. When I asked her if it was okay for her to date a man who had divorced his previous wife, she said that she would not prefer such a man, as she wanted her relationship to be long-lasting. If a man could divorce once, he could divorce for the second time.

Ah Mei expressed that it was so difficult to find someone she really liked. She thought that communication was the most important factor in choosing a boyfriend. Ah Mei wished that her boyfriend would be her soul mate. He should not be stupid so that he would be unable to understand her. She believed that God has created a perfect match for everyone, so there must be such a person on earth; it was just that she had not met him yet. Ah Mei felt that her boyfriend need not be a Christian, but he must respect her religion and have an interest in knowing more about Christianity. In addition to that, he must be very serious in treating his relationship with her, such as planning to marry her.

Ah On mentioned that her boyfriend must be responsible, must love her, and must be able to cook, as she did not like the feeling of touching fish or meat. She also mentioned “no smoking, drinking or gambling” as the criteria for a future spouse. She believed that her parents would prefer her future partner to be as rich as possible, but she did not think she was that materialistic. She was earning around seven to eight thousand dollars per month, and she did not mind if her partner was earning less than her. However, she thought that he needed to be hard-working and be able to support himself economically, rather than relying on her income. He must have a stable income, as she felt that a girl needed security. She did not mind if her partner had a lower level of education than herself; she thought that it would be okay as long as he were not illiterate.

It seems that Ah On did not mind her future spouse to be academically or

economically inferior to her. However, she could not accept a male who was shorter than herself. Concerning the spouse's age, Ah On thought that the person could be a maximum of 10 years older or 3 years younger than herself, but he must be elder than her in appearance, so that when they were to walk together, others would not ask questions like, "Is he your younger brother?" or "Is that your son?"

While Ah On liked to avoid people shorter or younger than her, Ah Kwan would not want to date any of her schoolmates. She explained that due to the fact that she had been living in public housing, a boy in the same secondary school might also be her primary schoolmate, as they all lived very near and went to school in the same district. Ah Kwan thought that it would be weird for them to become lovers while she had seen his most embarrassing moments, for example, if she had seen him crying after being beaten up by other schoolmates. From the example she mentioned, we can see that Ah Kwan could not accept a boyfriend who had shown his weakness in front of her. Unconsciously, she wished for her partner to be stronger than herself.

Chris used her younger sister's example to illustrate the kinds of criteria she used in looking for a potential spouse. Chris' sister Mary wanted to study theology; her boyfriend supported her and waited for her until her graduation. However, after a few years of study, Mary felt there was a huge gap between her and her boyfriend. She wished to break up with her boyfriend, but at the same time, she felt that it was not correct to break up with a boy who had been waiting for her for such a long time. Eventually, when the boy asked Mary to choose between him and her future career of becoming a missionary, Mary broke up with him. Chris interpreted the huge gap in her sister's case as the difference in closeness with God, and she thought that a couple would only be compatible if they had similar closeness to God. However, to explain this in a very secular way, people's closeness with God could be acquired by

more training in theology, more experience in church work, or even by achieving a senior position in the church hierarchy. Thus, the abstract “closeness to God” criterion that Chris used could be interpreted as a higher level of education, a senior position at the workplace or more life experience.

We can see from the above example that the criteria for choosing a boyfriend varied among my “moralist” informants: some required their boyfriends to believe in a certain religion, others required them to be filial to their family, and still others thought that they should be able to cook. There were some who wanted their boyfriends to be smart, while others preferred to have a boyfriend who was physically fit. However, to generalize from all the criteria mentioned by all of my moralist informants, we can see that they agreed that their partners needed to be in some way superior or at least comparable to themselves. For example, they needed to be physically taller, academically better-educated, economically better-off, or more spiritually adept. That is to say, the idea of “hypergamy” — to marry somebody in order to acquire a higher status — is still prevalent.

Dichotomized understanding of love

My informants expected that love needed to be permanent and caring. However, there would be no way to know whether a dating relationship would last when the dating started. So, under what circumstances would they start to date someone? Did they believe in love at first sight? Did they start dating because they were simply in the right mood for love?

My informants clearly dichotomized love into two big categories. One kind of love was out of passion and was irrational, and such a kind of love could be dangerous and destructive, as people engaged in this kind of love affair would not

care about the consequences. As passion would fade out very quickly, such a kind of love could not lead to a happy ending unless it would be transformed into the second type of love. The second type of love lacked passion, but it was more rational and more about responsibility. Due to its rational nature, such a kind of love would fit in with the right circumstances and social expectations, and was meant to be permanent.

That was how Ah Kwan distinguished herself from her classmates. She considered her classmates who were dating while studying as “problematic” students because she felt that they had fallen in love irrationally due to their own passion. She considered her own experience of dating as a good thing, because she believed that she was more rational and her relationship to be more inclined to the permanent type of love.

While Ah Kwan thought that she was mature enough to date somebody, Ah On found she was too old to start a romantic relationship. The reason for such an extreme attitude was again due to their different aspirations for the two different kinds of love. While Ah Kwan found the permanent rational type of love more appealing, Ah On was fond of the passionate kind of love. She wished that she could throw herself into love impulsively and regardless of the consequence (不顧一切). Sadly, after a certain age, she felt that she could not enjoy such passion anymore.

Ah Mei had a crush on a boy a few weeks before I interviewed her. She was so excited about it that she asked her friend to use tarot cards to predict whether or not they could be a good match, and if they had a chance to be together. This clearly shows that although Ah Mei expected love to be long-lasting, she also believed that a relationship should start with passion. The reason why she had not dated anyone yet is that she had not met anybody whom she considered both very attractive and someone whom she could be together with forever.

We can say that my “moralist” informants disliked the idea of match-making because they believed in destiny and romance. They would like their relationships to begin with the irrational type of love, rather than the rational type in which the candidates were carefully screened and arranged by their families or relatives. However, at the same time, they expected that love needed to be within the right circumstances and to fit in with social expectations. It needed to be transformed into the permanent, responsible and rational form, in order to sustain the relationship.

Analysis on love

To sum up the above cases, we can see that my moralist informants have not encountered any romantic experience that could be categorized as passionate love. They avoided dating in order to pursue their studies, or to perform the role of good daughters in the family. They believed in the idea of romantic love, and rejected the idea of match-making. They would be able to support themselves economically so that they would not be a family burden even if they refused to get married. By remaining a virgin, they were moral in a way that they would not disgrace their family.

Marriage

Practical concerns

Ah Kwan mentioned in the interview that her relationship with her boyfriend was very stable, and they would get married in another three years. She thought that the major concerns about her marriage were financial in nature. As she and her boyfriend both lived in public housing, and there were five family members on each side, it would be very crowded for them if Ah Kwan and her boyfriend lived with

either side of the family after marriage, and there would not be any private space for them. At the same time, it would be even “weirder” to live separately. So the only choice would be for them to move out together after marriage. In order to do that, there should be enough money for them to rent a place or to pay the first installment of a mortgage. She and her boyfriend had reached a consensus on this aspect, and they were both saving money for possible mortgage expenses in the future.

Whether to hold a wedding banquet was another big problem. As Ah Kwan had been a bridesmaid for her friend, she knew exactly how exhausting it could be.

She [her friend] tried to keep it as simple as possible, yet, it was so complicated. My boyfriend thought that holding a wedding banquet is like spending money to buy yourself troubles (貼錢買難受).

Ah Kwan totally agreed with her boyfriend, as she said,

Just think about all the dresses that I have to change [at the banquet, it's] like a fashion show! Especially after being the bridesmaid of my friend, I have seen how she suffered through the rituals and was exhausted at the end of the day.

Ah Kwan thought that young couples might wish to make their wedding as extravagant as possible, in order to leave a so-called “good memory”. However, she was quite sure that the memory would be a disastrous one financially for most of the couples. She and her boyfriend had thought about how they could make the ritual simpler, such as how they could cut corners in inviting their relatives. But they found that both of them were from big families, and the senior relatives would insist on certain procedures and have opinions on how the wedding should be held. She explained, “On my father’s side, there is already a batch of uncles. After counting all my relatives; it’s not difficult to understand why people can have more than 30

tables.”

Even though the formalities of a wedding seem to be troublesome, they did not make my “moralist” informants turn away from the marriage system. In the following part, I will show how the values of marriage made all the troubles worth going through.

Practical benefits

Ah Kwan and her boyfriend thought about cohabitation instead of marriage. But the chance for that to happen was very slim. She said that they would register their marriage even without the wedding banquet. She explained that this was not because she did not trust her boyfriend, or he did not trust her, rather it was because she would feel more relieved with a legal recognition.

She thought that sometimes people get married if they wanted to have children, as they wanted to be responsible parents. However, she thought that a person also needed to be responsible for his or her spouse.

If you have the marriage certificate, at least you can protect him in case anything happened to you. You want to leave something for your partner. If I die all of a sudden, I don't want my estate to be distributed to the people who don't deserve it.

Ah Mei thought that marriage was also necessary for a relationship in a practical sense. It could act as a guarantee. If the couple got along well, marriage would not hinder their relationship; however, when a couple wished to get a divorce, marriage could make them rethink rather than giving up on the relationship easily.

Either perfect marriage or no marriage at all

Unlike Ah Kwan, who had thought about the realistic problems that she might encounter if she was to get married, marriage remained more ideological for Ah Mei. Ah Mei believed that if a couple really wished to stay together, they should be willing to make promises and to bear responsibility. For Ah Mei, marriage was a very good social form to show your partner your willingness and sincerity. If a boy refused to get married, Ah Mei thought that the most possible reason would be that he wanted to avoid making promises, or was avoiding responsibility. Ah Mei believed that she could not date such irresponsible boys. If the boy refused to get married because he wanted to save money or avoid the trouble of inviting all the relatives, Ah Mei thought that was even worse, as that would be a sign of “nonsense” and “cowardice”. Thus, “there was no legitimate reason for not getting married when you have a stable romantic relationship”, she argued. Ah Mei would rather remain single if she could not find a suitable person. For her, marriage needed to be perfect and lifelong.

After all 10 of her siblings were married, Ah Fen found that marriage was not as wonderful as she had imagined. She cited her sister’s marriage: a man could be a good boyfriend, but conflicts arising from daily life would easily make him a bad husband. Seeing her brother-in-law and her sister get into conflicts and arguing with each other almost every day, such a marriage was not something that she looked forward to. She felt absolutely comfortable staying single and remaining safe from all such potential troubles.

Ah Fen told me that one of the reasons for her to refuse getting married early was because of a *feng shui* master. She did not hesitate even in her late twenties when most of her peers were married and available choices for her became fewer and fewer because the *feng shui* master told her that if she got married early, she would

have a divorce. To Ah Fen, marriage should be lifelong, and divorce would not be acceptable. If there were a chance of divorce, she would rather avoid getting married. Like Ah Mei, Ah Fen only wanted to get married if the marriage would be a perfect one.

Chris had had several romantic relationships with different boys at different stages of her life, one of whom even proposed to her. However, none of the boys became her husband because she was afraid of marriage. She enjoyed having someone to listen to her and being flirted with. She enjoyed dating all of her boyfriends. However, when their relationship became stable and serious, she began to become more and more afraid, and refrained from going further.

Chris acquired such negative feelings towards marriage after she had seen too many unhappy consequences of marriage from the example of her mother. She thought that marriage could be very insecure, for she could lose her husband anytime, just as her mother did. In addition to that, seeing her two grandmothers sharing one husband also made her think that marriage could be very insecure. Chris said that she had frustrations towards marriage in her late twenties to early thirties, because she was confused by marriage. On the one hand, she thought that marriage was a sacred, joyful union of husband and wife, and everyone was expected to get married. However, on the other hand, she did not want to make marriage the center of her life, and did not want to repeat her mother's or grandmothers' experience.

After seeing the example of her godmother who was happily married to a Christian, who had children and left her job, Chris gradually got rid of the frustration and convinced herself to believe in only the good aspects of marriage. When she started to review her feelings towards marriage, she said that maybe she needed to marry a foreigner as her godmother had. She felt that foreigners were less rigid, more

creative and gentler than most Chinese men. This became one of the reasons for her to study abroad. She also felt that marriage could be happy as long as it was secured by God, therefore her husband must be Christian. Even though she had seen many cases of unhappy marriage in her life, she still had faith in the marriage system, and was trying to copy the only successful example that she had seen as best she could, in the hopes of enjoying the same kind of perfect marriage.

Marrying for love

Ah Fen mentioned that in the past, especially during wartimes, people got married because they could then enjoy enough to eat. To Ah Fen, such a kind of marriage, based on material needs instead of based on love, was not what she wanted; she would not get married for money.

Ah On said that her mother had tried introducing some of her friends' or relatives' sons to her by arranging match-making dinners. However, Ah On refused to attend all of those arrangements and told her mother not to do that again. Ah Mei's parents had tried to make dating arrangements for her from the time she was 22. They urged her to start dating. However, Ah Mei thought that marriage is an extension of love, which should be decided, by destiny rather than arranged.

Marriage and Sex

Ah Mei's mother asked her not to be too persistent; she told her that marriage was very simple: "As long as you are compatible in "that" aspect (sexually) then it would work out". However, Ah Mei did not agree with her mother. She believed that her mother emphasized sexual compatibility because her mother and her father fought a lot on many other aspects and were only compatible when it came to sex.

She did not think that a proper marriage should exist in such a form. Sexual compatibility should not be a factor to determine if a person is worth marrying.

Ah On believed that a person should not have sex before getting married, and that a marriage must include sex. Once a person was married, she or he should not get a divorce unless one side had committed an unforgivable sin such as betrayal. When I asked her what if a couple found they were sexually incompatible after marriage, she said that she did not have an answer to this, as she did not have a boyfriend, and was not really eager to find one. Marriage for her was even further away. Thus, her ideas were only hypothetical and might be contradictory. She did not know if she would do exactly as she said if she were to fall in love with someone, because ideology and practice could be different.

Marriage and career

Unlike Chris' mother who thought of committing suicide because she did not know how to support herself, all my informants could quite easily get a job and support themselves financially. Ah On mentioned that if she got married, and her spouse was economically capable of supporting the whole family, she would still go to work, or at least find a part-time job. She said, "I cannot stand staying at home being lazy unless I have children and need to take care of them." Other informants also expressed similar views.

Chris loved her job, and said that she would not quit unless she felt it was difficult to manage both family and work at the same time. She admired her godmother who quit her job with a bright future, all for the sake of her family. For Chris, this was a big sacrifice and a touching decision. She said that if she were asked to select between career and family, she might not know how to make such a

choice.

Ah Kwan also mentioned that she would not give up her career because of marriage because, by then, she would be repaying the mortgage on her flat, so it was necessary to have a job and get paid.

The suitable age

Ah On believed that an ideal romantic relationship should start around the age of twenty, followed by a marriage at around 23 or 24, then giving birth to babies in the following years. If the couple planned not to have babies, they could postpone their marriage to their late twenties. She felt that she might have missed the chance already. Ah Kwan thought that most Hong Kong females get married in their late twenties or even early thirties, as it has been the trend for people to marry later and later. She felt that it would be good enough if she could get married before 30. Ah Mei also preferred to get married before 30. However she admitted that it might be difficult for Hong Kong women to achieve that goal, especially as they became more and more well-educated. She said that in Hong Kong it was quite strange to get married while still studying: "I'm already in my mid-twenties after my master's degree. What about those who wish to pursue a doctoral degree?... Luckily, with the advancement of medical technology, it is safe to give birth to children before the age of forty." So, for Ah Mei, it would still be all right so long as she were able to get married and give birth before the age of forty. Ah Fen knew that most people of her generation got married in their early twenties. She felt that getting married at such a young age was a blessing. "[These women] gave birth at a young age, and when the mother would go out with the daughter, they might be mistaken as sisters; that must make them very happy". Unlike Ah On, who felt she had already lost her chance of

marriage, Ah Fen was still hopeful about getting married. She thought that her understanding of marriage was different from that of other young people, as she felt that the most important function of marriage was having someone as a companion in old age. "As suggested by the *feng shui* master, I need to have a late marriage. He didn't mention how late it would be, so I'm still optimistic".

Breaking a marriage

All of the informants in this group wished for their marriage to be perfect, however they all knew that there must be conflicts when two people lived together. They all believed that people should live with some problems within a marriage rather than easily getting a divorce, however they also all believed that there were some principles that must be preserved. There is a list of things that they considered as deadly sins for a marriage which must not be tolerated. One of these is extramarital affairs.

Ah Kwan thought that there was a very low chance for her to have an extramarital relationship, because she would not give a chance to any potential suitors. She would doubt a person's moral integrity if that person were willing to be the third party interfering in a couple's marriage. She would only engage in an extramarital relationship if her husband did something really wrong, such as, for example, if he were to start an extramarital relationship or he took away all her savings for gambling.

If her husband were to have an affair with another person, Ah Kwan thought that she would help her husband to make a decision if he could not make the decision himself. "Either you divorce me or you stop the relationship with the third person." She imagined that,

If he did not think he loved the third party more than his wife, then he should keep the original monogamous relationship. If the husband really felt that he should be with the third party, then he should marry her and divorce his original wife. But he must be careful because, if a girl would continue her relationship with you even when she knew that you have a wife, then she cannot be a very good woman.

Ah Kwan would forgive her husband for having extramarital sex, depending on the situation, for example if it only happened once, under the influence of alcohol. Ah Mei also thought that if it happened for her husband only once, she would choose to forgive him. Ah On said that if her husband had extramarital sex, and by that time they have already have children, most probably she would forgive him and continue to stay in the relationship. If they did not have any children, she would probably leave her husband before he left her or hurt her. Ah Fen was the only person who did not think about forgiving. As she described herself to be a perfectionist, a marriage or romantic relationship, in her eyes, should be monogamous. "If he loves other people, why should I get married with him or stay in the relationship?", she insisted.

From what my informants said concerning extra-marital affairs, we can conclude that a "good woman" would not interfere in others' marriages by being "the third person". Thus, if a woman fell in love with a man after knowing he had married already, she would be considered an immoral woman. These informants believed that if a woman could be a third person once, she could do it twice. However, we do not see the same hypothesis being applied to men. Most of my informants did not realize that if a man had an affair once, he could have it twice. Men would be forgiven if they had been disloyal to their wives only for one time. On the other hand, a good woman should, once having decided to get married, stay in the marriage for her

entire life. A divorce would be the last thing to think of. This is extremely clear in the way that Ah Fen told me about her marriage. She refused chances of getting married at a young age because she wanted to eliminate the chance of divorce. She believed that if a person could divorce once, this shows that he or she did not treat her marriage seriously, so there would be a tendency for him or her to get a divorce again.

In the conventional view, then, a woman automatically became a sinner if she destroyed other people's marriage. She would be considered "problematic" if she could not manage her own marriage or relationships. This not only tells us about what is being considered as good womanhood in Hong Kong, it also reflects the sacredness of the marriage system.

Analysis on marriage

There are common points shared by all of the moralist informants in the aspect of marriage: 1) Marriage should be a perfect union of husband and wife, it should last forever. Once married, people should not divorce, otherwise they should remain single. 2) Marriage is an extension of love, which is controlled by destiny. A couple should only get married if they love each other, rather than getting married because they were arranged to, or for economic reasons. 3) A marriage must consist sex; however "sexual compatibility" was not a reason to get married. 4) Marriage should not bring an end to a person's career. Women should keep their job and be self supportive even after marriage. 5) Women could live a meaningful life by staying single. Getting married with their beloved one was not the only destiny, though it was the preferred choice. 6) There is an optimum marriage age, although this age might vary among different generations and among people with different life

pursuits.

Sex

Pre-marital sex

Among the five informants, Ah Kwan was the only one who thought that premarital sex was acceptable. She thought that,

Times have changed. In the past, people might get married at a very young age, but now, people get married rather late. So there might be more than ten years' difference in the average marriage age between now and the past, which means that people have to deal with their sexual desires before marriage... Celibacy would be a torture for both parties ... One of the reasons why I did not have sex with my boyfriend was that the environment did not allow us to do so. There were too many people in both families. If the environment had allowed it, I might have already had sex with my boyfriend.

Ah Kwan emphasized that as long as it was not forced on either party, people could have premarital sex. However, she knew that this point was tricky. She cited the Form Two girl whom she did not think was forced to have sex with her father's friend, but she thought that the girl was not mentally mature enough and she did not know what she really wanted. Thus, for her, mental maturity was another prerequisite for premarital sex. Although Ah Kwan used the word "mental maturity", we can see that in her case this should be better defined as "economic independence". It was only after Ah Kwan had a job for several years when she felt that it was okay to have premarital sex. Economic independence from her natal family was a key factor because she did not depend on her family to support her, thus she felt that she was freed from family control over her sexuality. The family members also felt that they

should give her the freedom for she was not dependent on them financially and therefore, they should not treat her as their property.

Ah Kwan also told me what she had seen in online discussion fora: On average, boys thought that it was natural to date and have sex with three girlfriends before they eventually got married, and they all wanted their girlfriends to be virgins.

The population ratio of girls to boys is not 3 to 1. So where are they going to find the virgins? They have to go to kindergartens!?

She found the opinions of males “interesting”, as she thought that if boys were not virgin boys upon marriage, why should a girl be a virgin upon her marriage? I then asked if her boyfriend was still a virgin. Ah Kwan knew that her boyfriend had one ex-girlfriend and he had had sex with her. However, she thought that her boyfriend was not very much into sex. Her theory was that since his sexual urge was not that strong, if he had sex with a girl, it must be out of love. From this we can see that another reason for Ah Kwan to accept premarital sex with this boyfriend was because she thought that he was a trustworthy person and would not have sex easily with the opposite sex. If he decided that it was okay to have sex, he would be as devoted to the relationship as she was. She believed that the relationship with her boyfriend was stable, and that they were a socially recognized pair. Their friends knew that they were dating each other, and their relatives endorsed their romantic relationship. This was also a sound reason for why having sex with him before marriage was acceptable.

The other four informants did not think they could accept premarital sex. Ah On believed that a girl should “love herself and keep herself clean” (潔身自愛), and she should refuse to have premarital sex, no matter what the situation. Ah Fen said that maybe she was too old-fashioned, but she really believed people should not have

premarital sex. She considered premarital sex “a blunder”. If she had a daughter, she would tell her not to have premarital sex, as it might lead to pregnancy. She did not support abortion. However, she did not prefer a marriage that was based on one’s responsibility for the conceived child. Thus, the best way to avoid such dilemma was to avoid having premarital sex. When I mentioned the point that people could use contraceptive devices, she replied saying, “still, accidents happen.”

Ah Mei felt that adults had the right to have premarital sex, and society should not punish them by law or anything. However, for herself, she would not have premarital sex, as she thought that marriage was the only legitimate way for people to have sex. According to Ah Mei, there could be very rare exceptions in which people could have premarital sex. One of the examples she gave was gay couples who wished to get married but could not get legal marital status under the current system. Or, when two persons, like Romeo and Juliet, who were devoted and were engaged to each other, but their marriage met with objection from their families, which would result in greater tragedy. Then, in such cases, a couple could be exempted from the requirement of marriage before having sex. If Ah Mei had a daughter, she would use the problems that single mothers faced to educate her, so that she would avoid premarital sex.

Chris also refused premarital sex. “Of course I would not have premarital sex because I’m a Christian,” she said, adding that premarital sex was actually harmful to the well-being of the individual. She used examples of people who had regretted having premarital sex to illustrate her point. Chris told me that some girls in her church revealed to her their stories of premarital sex, and in all of the cases, these girls found themselves to be dirty and wounded. “We are not looking down upon them. However, they would look down at themselves, ‘Dirty’ is the adjective used by

them to describe themselves,” Chris claimed. She would not see the girls as dirty, but she would see them as “incomplete”.

Chris also talked about how harmful premarital sex was to society. She quoted the case of Britain as an example. She said that after the law on cohabitation was passed, more problems arose in society. For example, a woman might have several children, each with a different biological father, and the women might be living with her boyfriend, ready to give birth to more children. The boyfriend would not want to support those children who were not his own. The biological fathers would not support those children either, as they had broken up with the mother already. Thus, all such burdens were shifted to the government. Chris felt that sex should only be within the context of marriage, because premarital sex was problematic.

Sexual urges and masturbation

When asked about masturbation, Ah Fen said that she had never thought about the question before, as she had never encountered any sexual urges. Ah Mei had read some books on this topic because she was quite curious and wanted to know more. She said that according to the books she had read, women had less sexual desire than men, but their desire would get stronger and stronger and reach a climax at around the age of 40. Ah Mei joked that if that was really the case, she would choose to marry somebody rather than masturbation. As she believed that through masturbation, “you could just fulfill your physical desire, but intercourse should be more enjoyable, as you really loved your partner”.

Meanwhile, Ah Mei did not think she needs to masturbate. She thought that masturbation was meaningless; if she had sexual desires, she would suppress it by shifting her attention on something else, such as reading a book or thinking about

what she was going to have for dinner. Basically, she believed that sex was a tool for reproduction, thus it could not be separated from reproduction. “You should not only want the process, and refuse to accept the product.” Ah Mei thought that it was only natural if sex happened in the context of marriage. It would be weird if sex were not articulated with reproduction or marriage. She could only accept the most “natural” form of sexual behavior, which was within marriage, out of love, and without the use of any contraceptive devices. She thought that even after marriage, she would not have oral sex or use sex toys, not to mention masturbation. Most Christian traditions hold that sex is inherently sinful, and sex may only be redeemed if performed within marriage for procreative purposes, and if the pleasurable aspects are not enjoyed too much (Rubin, 1998: 107). In my interview, Ah Mei was holding exactly this view.

Ah On was stricter in her views on premarital sex, but was less restrictive in her views on masturbation. She thought that sexual desire was a biological instinct, so it should be natural and normal to react to it, especially if a woman had no sexual experience, she would be even more curious about sex. So, masturbation was natural. However, as in the case of boys, girls should not be obsessed with it, otherwise it would be harmful to their biological health.

Chris believed that masturbation was not the solution for relieving sexual urges, as she thought “the purpose of sex was not to relieve sexual urges. Otherwise, how is a man different from other animals?” She used the word “abnormal” to describe masturbation. Unlike Ah On, who defined too much masturbation as being obsessive towards sex, Chris had zero tolerance for masturbation. She thought that masturbation itself was a sign of obsession with sex, even if it had happened only once. In addition, Chris felt that even between married couples, the use of pornographic material to enhance sexual enjoyment should not be considered normal.

“No other catalyst should be used except love,” She claimed. It seems that to Chris, love was able to cure impotence, erectile dysfunction, and premature ejaculation. Chris herself did not mention if she had sexual desire; she only said that for somebody to even think about using sex toys or pornographic material should arouse feelings of guilt and shame.

Ah Kwan believed that women sometimes had sexual urges. For example, she herself sometimes felt the urge while watching certain TV programs and books that contained sex scenes. However, due to limitations in her living environment, she would not masturbate. She claimed that usually after she stopped thinking about it, the urge would go away.

Although Ah On and Ah Kwan thought masturbation was acceptable, they were just being tolerant. In dealing with sexual desire, they chose to ignore it and switch their attention to something else. From this, we can see that both of them knew it was normal for women to have sexual desire, but simultaneously they felt that fulfilling such desires would be abnormal. For other moralist informants, having sexual desire itself was shameful.

One-night-stands

Ah Kwan thought that the idea of one-night-stands sounded terrible. She personally could not accept that. Her reason was, “if you did not know that person well, you would not know if he or she had any sexually transmitted diseases or Hepatitis B, and you would not know what was going to happen to you”. Ah Kwan thought that it was especially not okay for a married man to have one-night-stands, as he might infect his wife if he contracted any diseases.

Ah Mei thought that the idea of a one-night-stand sounded very dangerous. Ah On and Ah Fen both thought that one-night-stands were very bad, but Ah Fen pointed

out that it was still better than visiting a prostitute. She opined that prostitution involved no love but only sex, while one-night-stands could be a result of passion, although she thought that both were unethical.

Chris said that sex was a very intimate relationship, and that she had seen girls suffering from emotional breakdowns because of having sex casually. She said,

It's very easy to understand. Sex is such an intimate action and your body is highly sensitive to all sensations. There's exchange of secretions... Every time when a girl has sex with someone, a part of her was taken away and given to that person. After having sexual relationships with several different people randomly, you can imagine how torn apart those girls would feel. The more incomplete she feels, the more she is eager for an intimate relationship. It is a vicious cycle.

Commercial sex

Regarding prostitution, all five informants expressed similar attitudes. Ah On and Ah Mei thought that visiting a prostitute was unforgivable. To Ah Fen, prostitution was unacceptable, "I hate people who visit prostitutes, who smoke, who drink and gamble. I would not consider marrying someone who has any of these habits." Similarly, Ah Kwan believed that if she knew that a boy had visited prostitutes before, he automatically lost his chance of being her boyfriend. This is because if he had gone there once, he would go there for the second time, third time... and she had to bear the risk that he could not stop doing it even after marriage. Ah Kwan said that from her experience in school, not many boys would visit prostitutes, as there were a lot of female students who would be willing to have sex with them. We can see that Ah Kwan was comparing her female classmates who

agreed to have sex with male classmate to prostitutes. Chris thought the actual purpose of sex was to express love between two people. However, the only reason for going to a prostitute was to find a way to release one's sexual desires. Thus she would not consider prostitution a very bad kind of behavior. Moreover, even if sex were between a married couple, she would still consider some behavior as improper, one of which was viewing pornography to increase sexual pleasure. "They should naturally get aroused because they love each other; no other method should be used to get themselves aroused". Love in this case was so sacred that it could cure sexual dysfunctions like impotence or premature ejaculation.

Sex and reproduction

After understanding my informants' concepts about sex, it is not difficult to understand why they felt virginity was important. If the only purpose of sex was to reproduce, then a woman's sexual capital needed to be carefully guarded for the potential husband, as only this would guarantee that the offspring would carry the man's genes. One might challenge that we have technologies to check the child's DNA, so the father could easily make sure that the child was really his. However, there was a pseudoscientific "research" article on the internet repeatedly quoted by thousands of different fora and different individuals trying to highlight the importance of sexual purity by arguing that the uterus would absorb the male's semen, and that the influence could be as long as ten years.¹⁷ Such "research" tried to make people believe that if a woman had sex with a man, her body would absorb

¹⁷I accessed the link <http://www.discuss.com.hk/archiver/?tid-12797109.html> on 20 May 2011, which included a "research" article on how male semen would have long-term effects on females. The same "research" was quoted over 10, 000 times by different individuals in their blogs, and in websites that talk about sex. Although the author of the article used Dr Gossip as his/ her name, indicating that the "research" was just a joke, many people undoubtedly believed in it, and used it as support for practicing premarital celibacy.

some of the cells of his body. So, even if her child carried the biological father's DNA, the physical appearance of the child might resemble the mother's previous sexual partner.

Sexual purity and morality

Next we turn to views about the hymen. For many women and men, the lack of hymen in a woman indicates that she is not a complete person, as some part of her has been taken away and shared with other men, thus she does not deserve 100 percent devotion from her husband, and it would be legitimate for him to love her less. Such an argument is often sanctioned by religious beliefs and inspires people to think that only a woman who is complete deserves to be loved. Thus, there is a generalized requirement for chastity, especially virginity, and non-approval of pre-marital sex.

In the study of the female body, Bordo argues that "the firm, developed body has become a symbol of correct *attitude*," which has come to suggest "willpower, energy, control over infantile impulse, [and] the ability to 'shape your life'" (Bordo 1993:195). The size and shape of one's body thus has come to signify the moral state of the individual. (Bordo 1993) Similarly, for many people, the lack of a hymen not only indicates that a woman has had sexual experience, but it carries other cultural implications as well. For instance, the fact that she has lost her virginity before marriage means that she is emotionally unable to resist temptation. She will fall in love easily, and so she has lower moral status due to a higher tendency to betray a relationship. It is also a sign of lack of good upbringing, which means either her family has not valued her enough to take good care of her, or she has come from a problematic family, which is not able to provide her with the right guidance. Or she

is rebellious and does not listen to people who love her.

My five informants all had similar definitions of virginity. They thought that virgins were those who had not had sexual intercourse, and they defined intercourse as penetrative sexual behavior that involved a sex partner. All of them thought that masturbation would not disqualify a girl's status of virginity. But when it came to oral sex, they had different definitions. Some thought that oral sex would turn a virgin into a non-virgin. Some thought that oral sex was very dirty, but still, as long as the girl's vagina was not penetrated, she could still be considered a virgin.

Ah On read from books that a virgin would bleed at the first time of sexual intercourse, but she believed that this must be exaggerating. She claimed that if people did not have premarital sex, they would be virgins automatically, even if they did not bleed.

Ah Fen agreed with people who thought that if you love a woman, you should not mind whether she was a virgin or not. However, she also accepted the fact that men really cared if their girlfriends were virgins. So, she believed that women who were not virgins could not blame the man who did not accept her because he did nothing wrong. She must bear the responsibility herself.

Ah Mei said that if she had a boyfriend and she had previous sexual experience, she would tell him of her sexual history of her own accord, rather than waiting until he asked her. She argued that in this society, boyfriends were expected to know what their girlfriends had done. However, she would not require her boyfriend to tell her everything. She agreed that it was unfair, but this was unavoidable.

Margery Wolf, in her book *Women and the Family in Rural Taiwan* (year), points out that a woman is expected to shift loyalties from her natal family to her husband's family upon her marriage. When this shift of loyalty was not immediately

effected, the in-laws would regard the daughter-in-law with suspicion (Wolf 1972). And in Emily Ahern's study, she suggests that daughter-in-laws were considered dangerous mainly because their reproductive power could enable them to manipulate their husbands and in-laws (Ahern 1975).

In Ah Mei's case, we can see that she would actively reveal everything to her boyfriend in order to make her a less suspicious figure in front of him and therefore his family. By telling him about her past, especially her sexual history, it helps to build an image that she has nothing to hide and is therefore less dangerous. By not asking her boyfriend about his sexual history, the power relationship will be redefined based on the fact that she has shown her readiness to be submissive to let him to restrict her sexuality, and as a result, her reproductive power.

Analysis on sex

From the informant's interpretations of different forms of sexual behavior, we can make four points of conclusion. First of all, we can see a strong sense of sex negation in the way these informants treated sex, which in turn reflected on the sex hierarchy. They believed that sex was only acceptable when it was conducted within the marriage system, out of love and procreative; masturbation was unnatural, one-night-stands were immoral, and visiting prostitutes was unforgivable. Secondly, from the discussion of sex there emerged the concept of adulthood. Although my moralist informants had different degrees of acceptance towards premarital sex, they agreed that having sex was one of the rights of an adult, and everybody considered age 18 as the marker of adulthood. Thirdly, we can see that the family has been playing an important role in socializing them, as well as supervising their pre-marital lives. However, they expected that such control by the family would be minimized

when they became “mature” which was indicated by the ability to achieve financial independence. Fourthly, there was still a double standard on the requirement of sexuality for females and male, where females were expected to have more controlled sexual behavior, and their sexuality should be fully monopolized by their husband and his family.

In analyzing how my moralist informants legitimized their sexual choices, I would like to use Bourdieu’s concept of distinction. In his book *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, Bourdieu describes how an individual’s choice is a means to present to others her/his social space, and by doing so, people distance themselves from lower groups (Bourdieu 1984). This is especially obvious in Ah Kwan and Ah On’s case. Both Ah Kwan and Ah On lived in public housing; they had relatively low-income jobs, and did not have a high level of education. These could classify them as lower-class in terms of their socio-economic status. In order to distinguish themselves from other “grass-roots” class people, they mentioned how different they were from their other classmates: while their peers were having sexual relationships casually during their teenage years, Ah Kwan and Ah On were able to keep their virginity. This shows that despite the fact that they are economically less capable than average, they had high moral standards and good up-bringing. This point is extremely well-illustrated by how Ah Kwan subtly associated her female classmates with prostitutes. When asked about her views on prostitution, Ah Kwan mentioned that the boys in her school did not need to go to a prostitute, as there were female classmates willing to have sex with them. By associating other classmates with prostitutes, Ah Kwan, who maintained her sexual purity, made herself stand out from the other “cheap” classmates.

In Ah Fen’s case, it was more subtle. We need to first understand why she

stopped going to church. In her early twenties, some people approached Ah Fen and introduced Christianity to her. In the beginning, she liked going to church. Later on, she found that her church friends were not as good as she thought. Some were sexually active even if they were not married, but they pretended to be virtuous. Some were arrogant because they had Form Seven or university-level education while Ah Fen only had Form Five-level education. We can see that, like Ah On and Ah Kwan, Ah Fen also wished to highlight her high moral standards in order to acquire higher social status. Ah Fen not only emphasized her virgin status, but also stressed the fact that she was not using her sexual capital to get married. She pointed out that she would not get married for money, and felt all right being single, as she had a career and was content with her self-supporting life. This converges with Bourdieu's idea of social capital, in which "each individual occupies a position in a multidimensional social space; he or she is defined by the amounts of each kind of capital he or she possesses" (Bourdieu 1977: 72–95). Ah Fen did not have as high a level of education as the people she met from the church. However, by preserving her sexual capital, she felt she was superior to them because of her higher morality.

Ah Mei, who had a master's degree and who had come from a relatively affluent background, also said no to premarital sex. She was making use of her virginity to justify her high moral standards, as well as to spare herself from criticisms of being undesirable and being labeled as a "*sing6 neu5*".

Conclusion: changes and continuities

Society might criticize my "moralist" informants for being old-fashioned. Indeed, my moralist informants were quite conservative in the way that they treated sex.

In her work *Thinking Sex*, Gayle Rubin thinks that among the ideological formations, the most important is sex negativity. In this view, sex is considered to be a dangerous, destructive, negative force. (Rubin 1998: 106). We can see this from the above four informants' opinions, which all converged into a relatively negative attitude towards sex.

Some of them thought that sex was dangerous, while others thought that sex was dirty. In Ah Kwan's case, sex could only be redeemed by love, while in Ah Fen and Ah On's cases, sex could only be redeemed by love and marriage. In Ah Mei's view, sex was not simply dangerous and dirty, it was also full of guilt. Sex, to her, would only be innocent if it was for the purpose of love, marriage and reproduction. For Chris, sexual desire, in many cases, was simply lust. Even between a married couple, sex should be carried out as an intimate expression of love rather than a means to fulfill sexual urges. We can see a strong sense of sex negation, along with a hierarchy of sex that was aligned in accordance with moral acceptability.

In addition to their attitudes towards sex, my moral informants were very much influenced by traditional family values, which could be exemplified in their active engagement with the role of being a dutiful daughter. We can see that their marriage ideal did not change much, as they believed in life-long marriage and wished for their spouses to be superior to them, causing them to think that a wife should be subordinate to her husband.

However, we can see that there are some conspicuous changes in the way that these informants understood love and marriage compared to their mothers' generation.

Emergence of love

A number of scholars who studied love and sexuality had commented that the Chinese are uninterested in love. For example, Denis de Rougemont claims that for “the Chinese the problem of love does not exist” (de Rougemont 1974: i). He believes that love is unimportant, and it is never considered as a prerequisite for marriage in traditional Chinese societies.

However, in my study, we can see that all my informants had an aspiration for love, and they believed that love was associated to both marriage and sex. They believed that marriage was a system to secure love, and that sex was a means to express love.

Changed marriage forms

According to de Rougemont, due to the lack of love, Chinese marriages have been very often decided upon by the family, and act as a functional unit. This can be seen in Chris’s mother’s case, where Chris’s grandmother thought that her daughter was too young to be a widow and decided to marry her out again to her second husband. Indeed, marriage was the only way out for Chris’s mother because she was not economically independent.

However, in my informants’ case, they felt that marriage should not be based on economic reasons, and they rejected the idea of arranged marriages. They believed that marriage should be based on love, and that the love should start with romance. Introducing boys to a girl by relatives or friends was considered very normal and was actually the main means of meeting the opposite sex in traditional Chinese society. However, when it comes to the case of Ah On and Ah Mei, we can see that they refused arranged dating or match-making. While match-making was being carried out quite commonly in my informants’ parents’ generation, such arranged dating or

arranged marriages were not acceptable to my informants. Such practice was not only considered to be old-fashioned, but also to resemble suppression of the individual by her family. Although the “moralists” would take their families into consideration when choosing potential marriage partners, they thought that it was not right for their families to decide who they should marry. Listening to their families in the aspect of marriage should be a choice rather than an obligation.

No more reproductive obligation

In traditional Chinese society, in return for the husband’s economic provision, a wife was expected to contribute to the procreation of offspring for the husband’s family. Thus, a husband had the right to terminate a marriage if his wife could not reproduce. A woman’s reproductive power would logically come under the control of her husband and/or his family. My moralist informants had aspirations towards marriage, but not many mentioned that they preferred to have children. To my moralist informants, whether to give birth to children is also becoming a personal choice made by the couple, rather than an exclusive component of marriage. Although married females are expected to contribute to the males’ families by reproducing heirs, divorcing a woman simply because she does not have reproductive power would be considered ridiculous.

Increased financial independence

In Hong Kong, one of the reasons why women have more autonomy over their reproductive power today is because women generally depend less on their husbands in different aspects of life. Females for example have an equal chance of receiving education and enjoy relatively equal job opportunities as compared to males. Instead

of expecting their spouse to take care of them, all of my informants had the ability to live on their own means, and believed that they should not be economically dependent on their future husbands. My informants believed that they should continue with wage work after marriage. Working for pay and contributing to the household income has become an increasingly valued trait for a wife.

Sexuality

Regarding sex, my moralist informants had more reserved or traditional views than they had for love and marriage. They agreed that they should keep their virginity for their husbands. From the interview data, we can see that the family and religion were strong social institutions structuring their ideas towards sex and creating a frame of reference within which the women perform their everyday actions regarding sex. It also provides a comfort zone, in which these women found peace and a sense of security, because this would spare them from criticisms such as being “*lou5 chyu2 neu5*” or “*lo4 dai2 chaang2*”¹⁸. While these individuals were structurally restricted, they were actively reinforcing their comfort zone by claiming high moral standards, which is an expression of their agency. From the examples of my moralist informants, I can see that the agentive nature of women does not come only with sexual liberation. Being able to choose the desired sexual practices, e.g. celibacy, is also an important way in which individuals’ agency could be expressed. Women in Hong Kong society today are able to live on their own, to live a life without marriage and without sex.

But, such agency is so limited, and could be interpreted as a way of coping with the males’ desire for “good” women who keep their virginity for their anticipated

¹⁸ 籬底橙 literally translated as oranges at the bottom of the basket, is used to refer to women who are not selected for marriage.

marriage, and would not have pre-marital or extra-marital affair.

Thus, women live up to the moral ideal of the patriarchal family and patrilineal marriage by saving themselves as sexualized bodies for the anticipated marriage. Otherwise, they would be a shameful member of the family, and would not be able to enjoy a good marriage, or would be challenged afterwards.

We can see conflicting requirements acting on moralistic women today: on the one hand, women need to carry out certain moral values in how they think about sex and practice sex, but at the same time, women need to embrace new ideas of what constitutes “love” and to reject arranged marriage, which was the only means for women to get married in traditional society.

Being sexually restrained, while at the same time being “modern” and embracing romantic love, are feminine characteristics desired by men. These thoughts and action enable my moralist informants to fit themselves into the category of “good women”.

Chapter 3 The Mainstreams

“Sexual relationship should be based on love. You will know if you love him enough to have sex with him.” Gigi, 29, financial analyst.

Introduction

In the last chapter, I have discussed field data on informants who claimed that they had not had any premarital sexual experience, and held a relatively conservative view. In this chapter, I am going to look at another group of informants whom I classify as the “mainstreams”. The meaning of “mainstream”, according to the Oxford English Dictionary involves “ideas, attitudes, or activities that are shared by most people and regarded as normal or conventional” (Oxford English Dictionary 2011). Here I use the term mainstreams to characterize the informants who believed that their attitudes and experiences towards sex were shared by the majority of females in society. These informants were not like the “moralist” informants in the last chapter. They did not follow the moral ideal of not having premarital sex and remain a virgin upon their marriage. All the informants in this batch had virginal sexual experience. They thought that sex could be performed outside of marriage, because they believed that in present-day Hong Kong society the majority of females were not virgins when they got married. Not only was pre-marital sex accepted, it was considered normal and common. For them, virginity was an ideal but not quite possible in reality.

At some stage of their life, my mainstream informants were just like the

“moralist” informants in the last chapter, trying to follow the moral ideals. However, upon seeing people around them engaging in different kinds of sexual practice, they began to depart from the morally expected behavior. However this does not mean that my mainstream informants thought that they could have sex with anybody whenever they wanted to. They all agreed that there should be certain restrictions placed on sexuality, and they would only have sex with someone if they were dating and if they loved each other.

In the following discussion, I am going to show readers how my mainstream informants understood love, sex and marriage, and how these views reflect the social norms in Hong Kong today.

Table 3.1 “Mainstream” Informants

Informants (pseudonyms)	Age	Education	Religion	Sexual Orientation
Elaine	40	Bachelor’s Degree	Former Christian	Homosexual
Daisy	38	Some tertiary education	None	Heterosexual
Soso	31	Bachelor’s Degree	Christian	Homosexual
Gigi	29	Bachelor’s Degree	None	Heterosexual
April	27	Master’s Degree	Buddhist	Heterosexual
Yoyo	25	Bachelor’s Degree	None	Homosexual
Coco	25	Studying for a Masters Degree	None	Homosexual

Nga Wun	23	Associate Degree	None	Heterosexual
---------	----	---------------------	------	--------------

Among my 18 informants, eight of them could be categorized as members of the mainstream group. From the above table, we can see that the age range is quite wide. This group is also more diverse in terms of sexual orientation, religion and educational level. It is difficult to generalize this group in terms of their socio-economic statuses.

In the previous chapter, the informants defended their sexual practice by emphasizing that they were the most moral group of women. In contrast, the mainstreams group have so taken for granted their sexual practices and attitudes that they did not think it was necessary to provide any justifications for their sexual behavior. When I interviewed this group of informants, they always seemed to be confused over why I was asking them about their views towards sex, as they had never asked the same questions of themselves.

Before looking into how this group of informants interpreted their actions, I would like to introduce each of them in greater detail. Elaine was born in Hong Kong. She stayed in Hong Kong until Form Two¹⁹. After that, she moved to Canada with her family, and then returned to Hong Kong following her graduation from university. She was once a Christian, but after she broke up with her Christian girlfriend three years ago, she stopped going to church, and started to question her belief in Christianity. Although she did not consider herself as homosexual, all her previous partners were females. Elaine lived with her younger brother, and her girlfriend came to visit her or spend a night with her frequently.

¹⁹ Form Two means the second year in secondary school. In Hong Kong there are six years of primary education, and people usually start to go to school at the age of seven. Thus a person would normally be around 14 when he/she is in Form Two.

Gigi was born and educated in Hong Kong. She received a bachelor's degree in hotel management, and worked in the field of customer service for several years. She was working in an insurance company when I interviewed her. At that time, she was living with her fiancé and they would get married soon. When she was in secondary school, she had joined a Christian fellowship for several years, because her secondary school was run by a Christian church. Gigi stopped going to the fellowship in Form Five, as she felt it was more important to study hard for the HKCEE²⁰. After the exams, she did not return to the fellowship.

April was born in Hong Kong. She was the only Buddhist in this group of informants. Her primary and secondary school both had a Christian background, but she had never thought of converting, as her entire family believed in Buddhism. April went to Britain after Form Five and she finished her master's degree there. Then, she came back to Hong Kong to work in the finance sector. She lived with her family in private housing.

Daisy was also born in Hong Kong. After she broke up with her first boyfriend in the last year of her college education, she left Hong Kong for Canada to take a break. Daisy came back to Hong Kong in the 1990s and was in a stable relationship with her second boyfriend. However, she did not think that they would get married.

Like April, Soso also went abroad to study after Form Five. She went to Canada and finished her double degree program in Canada. Then, she worked for a year before coming back to Hong Kong. Soso was the only person in this group who would identify herself as a Christian. Since kindergarten, all of the educational institutions she attended were founded by churches; as a result, Soso was deeply influenced by Christianity. She was baptized while she was in Canada. Soso's

²⁰ HKCEE (Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination) is a public examination for secondary school graduates. Most local students sit for the exam at the end of Form Five.

secondary school was a girls' school. She started to have sex with one of her schoolmates beginning in Form Three.

Nga Wun was in her last year of her associate degree program. She had part-time jobs, but was economically dependent on her family. She lived with her parents in public housing. She believed that God existed and would pray to God whenever she was frustrated. However, she would not classify herself as a Christian because she felt that real Christians should always have God in their minds instead of only turning to God when they had problems. She felt that real Christians should have very high moral standards and that their behavior could serve as a role model for other people. However, she did not consider herself to live up to such standards.

Yoyo was born in Mainland China and moved to Hong Kong when she was in Form One. She went to a girls' secondary school, where she had a crush on one of her classmates in Form Two. Yoyo started dating her first girlfriend when was 18 or 19. Yoyo did not disclose her sexual orientation to her family members, nor would she actively tell her friends about it. She went to a Christian secondary school, but she refused to become a Christian because she could not accept the idea that people were born with sin. She felt that people should have confidence in themselves and were born to be good people — it was the environment and socialization they received that changed their good nature.

Coco was also born in the mainland, and she came to Hong Kong when she was in Primary Four. Her parents had been through the Cultural Revolution, and were big fans of Marxism. They did not believe in God and this set of values was passed to Coco. Coco went to a girls' secondary school and found that there were lots of lesbian relationships and tomboys among her schoolmates. Although she was not attracted to any of her secondary schoolmates, the experience of studying in such an

environment made her feel that homosexuality was just as natural as heterosexuality. As many of the homosexual girls in her school eventually fell in love with boys, typically when they went to university, Coco thought that one's sexual orientation could be fluid and situational. This explained why later on she started to have a relationship with the same sex without any feeling of guilt or other psychological issues. At the time of our interview, Coco was studying for a master's degree, and she considered her family an average income family.

Love

Family as panopticon

In the last chapter, we discussed the cases of “moralists”, who have been actively playing the role of dutiful daughters in the family. It is not surprising to find that the family also had a great impact on these nine informants in terms of how they understood and practiced the concept of love. All of the informants in this group mentioned how their family tried to influence their relationship with their boyfriends or girlfriends after they were being found out that they were dating. Take Daisy's case as an example. The control on her dating relationship by her family was obvious. Daisy said,

At that time, we didn't have cell phones, so he (my boyfriend) called my home number, and they (my parents) didn't allow me to answer his call. That was when I was in Form Two or Three, and he was two years my senior. Later on, he came to our home to help me with my studies by giving me private tuition for free. My parents got to know him in person and gradually accepted him.

When their relationship was still on good terms, Daisy's boyfriend had asked

Daisy to have sex with him, but Daisy refused. She gave the reason that “at that time, we were still young”. She was around 18 when this happened, and some people of such an age would already be getting married. Although she mentioned her young age, the main reason for not having premarital sex was the fear of being found out by other people, particularly her family members. She explained,

If we really had sex, it would be either at my home or his. But if it's at home, there would be a chance to be found out by your family members. As you don't know when your parents would return...it could be really embarrassing!

Daisy dated this boyfriend for several years, and they were planning to get married after her boyfriend graduated from university. However, they broke up and Daisy “escaped” to Canada.

Daisy met her second boyfriend in Canada, and had sex with him after dating him for about one year. She justified her action by saying that Canada was a different society from a Chinese society like Hong Kong.

The culture in another place is different; the atmosphere in Canada toward sex was more open. In addition to that, you were really very free. Your family was not there, and there was no one to supervise you²¹. You felt it's so natural. You went out together, you cooked together, and after dinner was finished, and when you were done with washing the dishes, you were both tired. Naturally he stayed. There's no pressure, no rule to bind you. Naturally we had sex, it was so natural that I didn't even ask myself if I should have sex with him or not.

Daisy thought that Canada was freer and more tolerant towards pre-marital sex:

²¹ Original words in Chinese 「D 屋企人唔係度，變左你無王管。」

However, I think that Canada was considered freer than Hong Kong because Daisy's parents and other social network were not there. She lived alone in Canada, and her parents were not there to ask questions about who she was dating. They were not there to block phone calls, and they would not be able to investigate the level of intimacy between Daisy and her boyfriend. They would not return home suddenly and find out that Daisy was having sex with someone. If Daisy's parents were in Canada, I am sure she would find Canada as "conservative" as Hong Kong. This point is further reinforced by Elaine's case.

Elaine told me that while she was in Canada living with her parents, she did not have a chance to cohabit with any of her girlfriends. Once she brought her girlfriend to stay overnight. Her mother insisted on separating the two girls by asking them not to sleep in the same room.

She (Elaine's mother) knew my girlfriend well, as she always came to our apartment. My Mom was very hospitable to Chinese students overseas. Her (girlfriend's) parents were not in Canada, so my Mom invited her home often, especially during school holidays. We pretended to be very good friends. However, my Mom very probably was able to sense something, even though I had never told her. She asked me to sleep in my brother's room because he was in Hong Kong at that time, so that my girlfriend would sleep in my room. ... To avoid confronting my Mom, I accepted the arrangement and we slept in separate rooms.

Elaine did not tell her parents about her relationship with her girlfriend. So there was no reason that her parents could forbid Elaine from hanging out with girls even though they might be able to guess their relationship. They would never ask, in order to avoid facing the truth. However, when it came to staying overnight,

suggesting tendencies of having sex, her mother became really sensitive and tried to apply a strict behavioral code. Elaine's mother would do whatever she could to stop her daughter from spending the night with anyone. After Elaine came back to Hong Kong, she lived with her girlfriend in an apartment that she rented. However, whenever her mother came to visit Elaine from Canada, her girlfriend would move back to her own parent's place.

From this example, we can see that the so-called "foreign environment" in Canada did not provide people a leeway to premarital sex, but being away from the parents did. Daisy started to have sex in Canada, while Elaine thought Hong Kong was freer because their parents were not there to scrutinize them.

The following story from Elaine's experience would better illustrate the point. Whenever her mother came to visit Elaine from Canada, her ex-girlfriend would move back with her own natal family. In 2006, Elaine took some wedding photos with her ex-girlfriend, and the largest photos were hung on the wall in her bedroom. Those that came in smaller sizes were framed and placed in different corners of the bedroom. However, before her mother's visit, Elaine removed the photo from the wall, replaced it with a Mickey Mouse puzzle of a similar size, and made sure the photo was well wrapped. She also made sure that all of the other smaller wedding photos were carefully hidden, in between the books or in the drawers. When I commented that she was acting like a person hiding the evidences and preventing her next girlfriend from knowing her past, Elaine revealed that the most ironic thing about her experience was she did not try to hide the photos when she invited her current girlfriend to her house.

The family, for these informants, is similar to a panopticon in which a single guard can watch over all of the prisoners. In *Discipline and Punish* (1975), Foucault

proposes further that in the panopticon, individuals are separated and individualized, and the power within it is perfected as individuals act as their own supervisor. Family surveillance thus acted as a true deterring factor for my informants if they ever considered having sex.

Nga Wun started dating while she was in Form Two. During one of the school holidays, her boyfriend invited her to go camping. When Nga Wun's father found out about this, he immediately turned down Nga Wun's request to go camping, and explained to her how dangerous it could be for a young girl to go out with a male.

Being the eldest child in her extended family, Coco was spoiled by her uncles, aunts, and grandparents. However, such attention only made it more difficult when she wished to continue her relationship with her girlfriend. She explained,

All my relatives have high expectations on me. They thought that I had always been acting as a role model for my cousins, and if there's anything wrong with me, the impact would be terrible.

When Coco tried to tell her parents about her homosexual relationship, the result was disastrous. Her parents first tried to persuade her to give up the relationship by pointing out how her partner was not a good match for her. After discovering that Coco was not taking their advice, her mother warned Coco that if she wanted to come home for Chinese New Year, she would need to first break up with her girlfriend. Coco did not break up with her girlfriend and went home for Chinese New Year anyway. However, she remembered that the atmosphere was very odd: "There was no conversation, no festivity; my home was just like a hotel."

One summer, Coco travelled abroad with her girlfriend. She told her parents that she was going with a group of friends, and that was why they allowed her to go. However, later on when her parents found out that the two girls had been travelling

on their own, they became furious. This was not only because Coco had lied to them, but they were also angry because travelling together would signify the chance of sexual relationships. After this incident, Coco's father even found out her girlfriend's address from Coco's trash bin. He warned Coco that if she did not listen to her parents something tragic would happen. Coco feared that her parents would really be waiting at her girlfriend's door whenever they wished to find her, so she lied to them that she had broken up with that girl. This time instead of believing what Coco told them, her parents tried every means to ascertain Coco's relationship with her girlfriend. Coco cited an example: one time she forgot to log out from her Facebook account, and her father clicked on her photos and saved those she had taken with her girlfriend. Another time, her mother's cell phone was broken, so Coco lent her cell phone to her mother, and her mother went through all the text messages that Coco had sent to her girlfriend. When Coco later denied being together with her girlfriend, her parents confronted her with the photos and the text messages.

Coco said that every time when she would go out, her mother would ask where she was going, with whom she would be going, what would she be doing and when would she be back. Whereas before she was so used to answering such questions that she would not even think that she had the right to not answer them, following these incidents, she began to challenge her parents, saying that they did not have the right to ask such questions. Coco pointed out to her mother that some of her friends could go anywhere they liked. Her parents' feedback to this challenge was, "[T]hose families don't care enough for their daughters, but we do everything for your own good!"

So, Coco started to make up an answer every time she went out with her girlfriend and became very anxious, for fear that her parents would find out about the

truth. When Coco lent her mobile phone to her mother, she said that her mother then copied the numbers of Coco's best friends', so that later on her mother would be able to call them and check if Coco was telling the truth. Coco said that she was very embarrassed for bothering her friends. She felt that if this were to continue, it would affect her relationships with her friends.

Coco thought that eventually her family would drive her crazy and confided in the interviews that she had already begun to have nightmares in which more evidence of her relationship with her girlfriend was being discovered by her parents. Some of her friends suggested Coco to move out. However she thought such suggestions were too idealistic:

First of all, given that rent in Hong Kong is so high, I need to be more economically capable before I can consider moving out. Even if I'm capable economically, I have to justify why I need to move out. Our house is not big, but obviously not small by Hong Kong standards, I have my own room, compared to those who only have the upper bunk as their private space. So using the idea of privacy would be unconvincing. Even if they (her parents) allow me to move out, they would try to help in deciding where I should live, preferably near them. Unless I were to tell them that I have a roommate, I'm sure they would ask for a key and frequently come to help with my "cleaning" or similar stuff, in order to check on me. If I tell them I have a roommate, I'm sure they would request to know who that person is. My mom told me repeatedly that my grandparents worried about her even now, even after she has been married and her kids are almost grown-ups. Thus, she has more legitimacy in trying to take care of an unmarried daughter like me.

Coco told me that she had previously lived in a student hostel, which she

described as being the best time she had with her girlfriend. She was able to see her girlfriend often, and there was nobody to question her about why she came back late, or where she had been. When I interviewed her, however, she had already moved back to live with her family. She confided that it had become very difficult for her to see her girlfriend since moving back home. Coco thought that there were only two ways out: either elope to another country with her girlfriend and never call her family in case they could trace her through that number; or alternatively, get married to a boy that her family liked and avoid all of these troubles in future.

Actually, Coco's family was not unusually strict in controlling her. Other informants reflected that their family was as strict as Coco's. For example, April said that her family was like any typical traditional Chinese family. She suspected that her parents must have been virgins when they got married, and so they expected April to be a virgin upon her marriage as well. To achieve that, they supervised every aspect of her life in similar ways as Coco's parents had done with hers. When they learned that April had a boyfriend in Britain, they constantly asked April about how well they were getting along. Interestingly, to avoid being constantly bothered by her parents, April admitted that she had had sex with her boyfriend. At this, her family was furious, but could do nothing, as it had happened already. The family then demanded that April come back to Hong Kong so that she could face them "in front of their eyes". April thought that if she had been in Hong Kong, her family would do everything to prevent her from having sex with her boyfriend. However, due the fact that she was in Britain, the control of her family was curtailed.

Gigi said that she remembered her mother trying to frighten her by quoting tragic examples of unplanned pregnancies reported in the newspapers. When her mother learned that Gigi was going to travel with her boyfriend, she asked Gigi to be

careful, and emphasized the importance of “safety” without specifying if she meant safe sex or having a safe trip. When Gigi moved in with her fiancé, her mother questioned frequently why she lived with a man without getting married to him. Gigi thought that her parents had the traditional thinking that if you had sex with a man, you were being taken advantage of. When I asked if her mother knew she has been “taken advantage of”, Gigi answered,

Of course she knows! Once we were having sex when she returned home. Maybe she was too shocked; she did not scold me immediately. On the following day, she nagged me, kept saying how many times she had warned me, yet I had ignored her advice. She said that since I have chosen my own way of doing things, I should be old enough to know what I was doing and I have to bear the consequences for not listening to her.

April did not have a boyfriend when I interviewed her; she said if she had a boyfriend, she would not bring him home to stay overnight. If her younger brother had a girlfriend, that girl would not be allowed to stay overnight at home either. If she herself had a daughter, she would not forbid her daughter from having sex before marriage, but she would try to influence her daughter so that she (her daughter) would choose carefully and only have sex with a person who promised a long-term relationship. She would also give some pressure to her potential son-in-law, so that he would marry her daughter, rather than simply living together.

From the above example, we can see that the families had been monitoring every stage of the informants’ lives as they grew up, and were trying to make sure that everything was carried out in the right way. The families scrutinized the potential partners of their daughters and would ban or forbid their daughters from going out with them, as could be seen in Coco’s case. When the family could not stop a

daughter from dating, they would try to limit her dating in a manageable context, such as what happened in Nga Wun's case when her family turned down her request to go camping, or in the case of Daisy, when she and her boyfriend could only meet in tutorial lessons. If the family could not stop or monitor them in the stage of dating, it would try to stop and prevent them from having sex, as we saw in Elaine's case, when she was asked to sleep in another room separate from her girlfriend. If the family knew that their daughter had already had sex, it would try their best to pressure the daughter and the man to get married, just like in Gigi's case. If this failed to push them to get married, the family would try to prevent such things from happening again, as in April's case, in which her family demanded her return to Hong Kong.

Dichotomy of Love

As mentioned in the previous chapter, my moralist informants tended to see love as a combination of passion and permanence. Similarly, my mainstream informants also used such a binary system when they evaluated their own dating experiences. Coco originally thought that love did not exist. She thought that love was only the imagination of people; it was only the wishful thinking of people who had read too many storybooks and watched too much television. She had such ideas because she had never observed any trace of love between her parents. She thought that there was a certain something between her father and mother, which she said she would merely describe as affection established after living as a couple for a long time. However, she eventually discovered another kind of love, and that romance and passion would exist in reality:

I cannot imagine myself falling in love with her. I thought I liked people who

were mature and could look after me, but she was emotionally unstable and needed to be taken care of. I thought I would only date people who were of my own age, but she was almost 20 years older than me. I thought I needed someone who had a nice job, or at least I could see a good prospect in his job. But when we first started dating, I knew that she had been earning less than 10 thousand (per month) for years, which means that her job was neither well-paid nor well-respected. Even more unbelievably, she was not a man! Originally, I didn't believe there's romantic love. I thought it's only the imagination of people. Now I do. Sometimes, I wonder why I fell in love with such a person. I think the most important reason for loving her is that she is so devoted, and when I am dating her, I strongly feel that I'm in love.

From this we can see that Coco has identified two kinds of love: the first one was what she had observed from her parents, in which there was a lack of passion, but consisted of a caring and stable relationship. The second kind of love was what she was experiencing herself, which was passionate, irrational, and might not last for long. She explained,

Maybe one day I will suddenly realize what a fool I have been and may immediately break up with her [her girlfriend]. Passion is very chemical, and it can vanish in any second. Otherwise, we need to bring our relationship to another level, like my Dad and Mom's. If we can reach the stage where we are so used to each others' presence, then we will not break up easily.

After several relationships, Nga Wun said that when people grew up and saw the world, they would have more considerations before they started a relationship:

When I dated my first boyfriend, we loved each other whole-heartedly, because love was the only thing in our minds. However, when I grew older, I

found that people had more complex aims. They were calculating what they could offer and what they could get in a relationship. For me, I also became more realistic and felt that a simple, pure romantic relationship would never be possible again.

When Nga Wun reflected on her first romantic relationship, in which they loved each other whole-heartedly, she tried to emphasize the passionate nature of love. The reason for breaking up with her beloved first boyfriend was that “he changed”. According to Nga Wun, online fora started to be a trendy thing for teenagers like she and her first boyfriend. Her boyfriend became obsessed with it, and started to hook up with other girls that he met through the fora. Afterwards, she thought that such a passionate kind of love would deteriorate sooner or later. When I asked if she loved her current boyfriend, she said, “It has been quite long that we have been together, so I think neither of us would want to break up... The older I get, the less I want to give up and start from zero.” Nga Wun would not even use the word “love” to describe her relationship with her current boyfriend, as she did not feel the intensity of love or passion in this relationship. However, she was still content because she expected that it would be long-lasting.

Similar to Nga Wun, Soso at one point thought the only thing she had in her mind was love, and later on, instead of longing for passion in a relationship, found herself more and more in need of a lifetime companion:

There is a time when I put almost all my effort into dating. I was very athletic. I ignored my studies but had very good performance in sports, thus I had many “fans”. The weirdest experience for me is that I slept with two girls in the same bed. I know they were both hurt, as they knew I was involved in relationships with others, but that was when I was very young and didn’t care

about the consequences. Now, I want to be stable, and I am more focused on my career. When you reach a certain age, you know you don't have too much time to hang out with so many people. So, I long for a long-term relationship. The older I get, the more security I need.... I long for a long-term experience, I mean life-long. But, so far I have found it's difficult to be with the same person for my whole life, maybe I have been influenced by my father and inherited his philandering gene. Maybe it's just I haven't met the right person... I don't understand why I'm always like this, why I keep searching all the time. Maybe I fall in love and start dating a person too quickly, and in the beginning we are very happy, but later on I always find a better person.

Sometimes Soso felt that she was imitating her father, who had been involved in relationships with other women even after his marriage, or she might think that she had not met the right person. But, in fact she was looking for a particular kind of relationship — one that was passionate and permanent at the same time.

While Nga Wun felt it was a pity when passion started to fade and was replaced by a passionless long-term relationship, Gigi thought that becoming more realistic was a good thing because this was how love could lead people to marriage. Gigi started dating in Form Two or Three. However, she did not consider those as serious relationships:

I had many dating experiences when I was young. They were puppy love only. I would consider that I have had only two serious romantic relationships, one with my fiancé, and another one with the person before my fiancé... Yes, both are the type of person that I think I would like to marry.

From the above discussion, we can see that the informants' families were very much aware of the destructive power of passionate love, and therefore it tried to

stretch its influence to the greatest extent possible to ensure that their daughter would not fall in love impulsively. However, when they found out that the relationship would fit into social expectations and might be long-lasting, there would be greater acceptance. That is why a difference in attitude could be observed in the ways in which different families reacted to their daughter's romantic relationships. While the family always held a negative impression towards passionate love and would prefer permanence, my informants had different preferences towards the two different types of love. Some preferred long-term relationships, while others preferred passionate love. However, in the end they all made the distinction between the same two different types of love that seemed to be mutually exclusive in nature. As mentioned in the previous chapter, concepts of sex and marriage had long existed in Chinese culture, and love is a new idea developed recently in this century to stick sex and marriage together. We can clearly see a dichotomy of love defined by my informants, and I argue that these dichotomies simply represent the two institutions that "love" was trying to glue together. The passionate nature of love is a code for sex, and the permanent responsible nature of love connotes marriage.

Marriage

In this section, I would like to explore what made my informants fond of or afraid of the idea of marriage, and I will discuss how they interpreted marriage. Since marriage is the primary site for sexuality, understanding marriage would help to elicit my informant's ideas on sexuality.

Soso said that she could not imagine herself getting married. She believed that her father's attitude towards her mother had affected what type of person she wanted to be. Soso thought that her parents did not have a happy marriage because her father

always had mistresses. When I asked how she knew that her father had mistresses, she said, "Oh come on, he brought them home, we ate at the same table and I was asked to call them 'Auntie'."

Since her father was the source of income for the household and the head of the family, Soso's mother depended on her husband economically and had to put up with him under all circumstances, including seeing him womanizing. Soso recalled,

She [her mother] had to tolerate everything, even my father's mistresses. She didn't know how to argue, and she could only cry.

Soso assumed that the male in a relationship was always the more manipulative partner, and as the female had to depend on the male, she became subordinate. Patriarchal ideas were so deeply rooted that Soso could not imagine a heterosexual relationship in which the female was not being manipulated. In order to avoid the undesirable situation that her mother (or many other women) ran into, she believed that the only thing she could do was to perform a male role in a homosexual relationship.

Soso felt that "being chosen" was the start of her mother's tragic relationship with her father, and getting married had made such tragedy irreversible. Soso pitied her mother, and resolved to live a life different from her mother's:

I don't have confidence in marriage. I'd rather be like my father. I don't want to be like my mom. I don't want to have to rely on people. Usually a male will not attract me. Even if I find a male attractive, I know he might not want to choose me as a partner. Instead of being chosen, why not choose others? I feel I have to be independent; otherwise, I will be manipulated.

Yoyo's case was similar to that of Soso. Yoyo's mother was a single mother, and Yoyo did not know who her father was. When Yoyo was around two years old, her

mother got married and gave birth to another child. However, the marriage did not have a happy ending. The couple soon got a divorce.

Yoyo did not believe that a romantic relationship would be secured by making it legal, nor did she feel that being together with a man would provide her with a sense of security. Feeling that her mother had been a victim of a heterosexual relationship, as well as of the marriage system, Yoyo did not want to repeat the life of her mother. Yoyo mentioned that since she was a child, she had felt that her mother was often being looked down and humiliated only because she was a single mother, and also because she was considered to have failed in managing her marriage. Thus, Yoyo felt that she had to be strong in order to protect her mother and herself, and to be in control of her own life.

Unlike Yoyo and Soso, Gigi confessed that she has never thought of being single in her life. She thought the reason might be because, throughout her upbringing, people around her would all get married.

My parents, my two elder brothers, and my friends...Their marriages were not perfect, but at least they did not discourage me from considering marriage...I have a lot of cousins, and they all got married. Both my brothers are married and have had children already. I didn't set a limit for myself as to when I must get married, but when you see others getting married, and when you are being invited to so many wedding banquets, you will naturally think that one day it will be your turn.

Gigi was a bridesmaid at her brother's wedding. She said that being the bridesmaid and even the master of ceremony for the wedding enabled her to learn more about how a wedding is conducted, so that she had more confidence in facing practical issues related to marriage.

I learnt a lot from their experience, like where to take the photo, where to hold the banquet, what preparations need to be done, what other considerations you need to have, what budget you need to plan for... all the logistics of a wedding. Ha-ha, I could be the wedding planner for my own wedding!

Gigi's idea about the wedding also affected her criteria for choosing a right spouse:

My fiancé really loves me. He treats me like a family member. He is the kind of person who cares for his family, and this may be the reason why I have decided to marry him. There were other suitors, but I eventually chose him because he is so good to me. He provides me with a feeling of stability and comfort.

April considered her parent's wedding to be quite ideal; she said that she would prefer a marriage like her parents'. Her parents had placed a lot of importance on family values. Similarly, she would place family as the first priority among other important things in her life, therefore, she believed that her future husband must love her as well as her family. This shows that to April, marriage was a social institution that joined two families instead of two persons. Getting married was actually forming another family unit which resembled their original families, and it contained all the core values inherited from the groom's and the bride's family.

Coco told me that her parents were introduced to each other by relatives and colleagues. They got married after dating for less than one year. Coco thought that their marriage was practical and functional; although there seemed to be a lack of passion, they were a good match in other people's eyes:

Maybe my father loves my mother, but that love has been replaced by

responsibility. Despite the fact that my Mom always nagged my Dad, she had all the desirable qualities of a good woman. She sacrificed her career and moved to her husband's place of work. She gave birth to a boy and a girl, and she took good care of the children. She did not spend a penny more than she needed to, and she helped her husband with his business.

Coco did not think that her parent's marriage was based on love, yet she thought that everybody, even herself, would consider them to be a happy couple. For her own marriage, she anticipated that it would be more or less the same:

For the time being, I think I'm fiercely in love with her [her girlfriend]. However, if we were married, I expect that the feelings would be diluted. We might gradually get too used to the presence of each other. Although I hate the feeling of being taken for granted, I won't reject marriage. Marriage stabilizes a relationship. Once you make that decision, you would stop thinking about the chances of being involved with other people.

Like Coco, Nga Wun also felt that marriage would secure a relationship by transforming the nature of the relationship. She talked about passion while discussing love. However, when it came to marriage, she mentioned economic status. She preferred that her spouse earn around 25k per month, be filial to his parents, as well as to her parents, be responsible and be progressive. These were the four main criteria. Nga Wun felt that marriage was important for the parents, more or less like an assignment you hand in to your parents. The parents would be relieved and happy when they saw their children getting married. Nga Wun thought that marriage was also important for a woman — it would be an acknowledgment of her status. Once a couple got married, they should expect that their marriage would last forever. She thought that it might be a good idea to give birth to a child because this was an

assumed responsibility in the eyes of the mother-in-law, and it was also a way to secure the marriage because the woman had made such a huge contribution to the husband's family by continuing his family line.

When I asked Nga Wun if she would accept cohabitation, she said she might consider it, but she was very sure that she would get married to her boyfriend eventually. She said that if she had a daughter, she would not let her have sex with a boyfriend who was only willing to cohabit with her and not marry her. "Marriage is the ultimate goal!" She claimed.

Age matters

Daisy had been dating her current boyfriend since 1993. They had been together for more than 15 years. When I asked her if she had considered getting married with him, she said that she had thought about it before, but found that the situation was not suitable. During the first few years, she and her boyfriend had to live separately because Daisy needed to get her medical treatment in Hong Kong, while her boyfriend needed to stay in Canada in order to get his citizenship. After her boyfriend got Canadian citizenship, it took another few years before he decided to reside in Hong Kong. After everything was settled, she felt she was already too old to be a bride.

Daisy thought that a wedding was something designed for young people, as only young people had the fantasy about being brides and grooms. Just like fairy tales were designed for children, only young people would be dreaming of a spectacular wedding and imagining themselves to be princes and princesses living happily ever after. She said that in the first few years of dating her boyfriend, she still hoped that she would get married. However, as time went by, she felt that

marriage was not a necessity. One of the reasons for this change of mind was that her parents had stopped urging her. She said, "Once you're over 30, your family won't push you."

At the age Daisy felt that she was too old to be a bride, Elaine was looking forward to being the "groom". After dating her ex-girlfriend for over eight years, they decided to get married by the end of their 9th year together. Although they broke up before their planned wedding date, this did not affect Elaine's positive attitude towards the marriage system. Marriage was something absolutely necessary for Elaine. She believed that marriage would act like a guarantee for a romantic relationship. Elaine told me that all of her past girlfriends eventually left her for men. This made her feel that if she did not get married, her girlfriend might leave her at any moment, no matter how long they had been dating each other. With marriage, their relationship would be secured. When I pointed out that there is something called divorce, Elaine said, "This word does not exist in my world. Once I'm married, I will not divorce." When I asked if she wanted to be married by a certain age, she said that it mattered a lot for most women, including her girlfriend, but it did not bother her at all. Undeniably, the marriage system gives more flexibility to males or persons who were playing the male role, rather than females:

If you wish to have children, then you need to get married by a certain age and give birth before a certain age, otherwise it shouldn't matter. Even if we are having children, I won't be the one getting pregnant, so it doesn't matter... The older the person gets, the more security a person needs, so I do not believe that people would lose their desire for marriage when getting old. I am looking forward to my marriage; I think we will be living happily ever after like a prince and princess.

The marriages of my informants' parents had greatly influenced how my informants themselves thought about marriage. My informants were more encouraged to get married if they saw their parents' marriage as being a happy one, and they would not want to get married if they saw an unsuccessful marriage between their parents.

In the research done by William Jankowiak, he found that the majority of the Chinese married couples did not experience passion, and therefore "dismissed love per se as a simple illusion" (Jankowiak 1995: 180). Considering my data, it is quite interesting to see that my informants agreed that marriage must be based on love. Yet, to them, passion was not an essential criterion. Instead of dreaming of getting married when they loved each other the most, my mainstream informants expressed that a lot of times, marriage was seen as a ritual that needed to be performed at a certain time, according to social expectations.

Sex

Age matters

In the interview with April, she expressed her general feelings toward people's sex attitudes in Hong Kong by comparing them to the situation in Britain. She thought that unlike in Britain where people were bound by religion, in Hong Kong most people enjoyed more freedom toward sex. She believed that most girls lost their virginity around 15, and she bet that it would be difficult to find a girl who was still a virgin after they had entered university. April used the term "cheap" to describe those girls who lost their virginity early. However, this does not mean that April would say no to premarital sex. When I asked her if she was a virgin, she put on an astonished expression and said, "Considering my age, if I told you I was still a

virgin, you would think I'm abnormal, right?" April also mentioned that if she had a daughter, she would allow her to have sex if she was old enough.

April's reaction showed that both virgins that were old and non-virgins that were young were targets of stigmatization. This implies that the first sexual experience for a woman should occur within a certain age range, and suggested that instead of religion, social expectation was the real factor influencing a woman's ideas on sex.

April had sex for the first time at age 21, after she had been dating her boyfriend for several months. When I asked April about her attitude towards premarital sex, she said that she accepted premarital sex because she had already done taken part in such acts. She said that she did not regret it because it was her own choice. April emphasized that, as no one forced her to have sex with her boyfriend, it was a manifestation of her subjectivity and autonomy over her body and sexuality. When I asked if she would rather save her first sexual experience for her future husband, she said that, "This has passed already; people have to be forward-looking instead of looking back."

It was obvious that April avoided looking back at what she had done. She did not define premarital sex as something wrong because she did not feel that she had done something wrong. However, she could not announce that she had done the right thing either. She tried to persuade herself into believing that the loss of virginity was just a process that might come sooner or later, and as what she had done was simply a common phenomenon, there was nothing that she needed to be challenged about; as a result, there was no need for her to be reflective.

Nga Wun had oral sex with her first boyfriend because, in her definition, a girl was a virgin as long as she was not involved in vaginal sex with a boy. She knew that

by the time she had oral sex, many of her friends had already “popped their cherries”. (破處) Therefore, she was quite proud of her status as a virgin. However, later on, she felt that vaginal sex was not really a big deal. This was because when she had reached a certain age, no one expected her to be a virgin anymore. Nga Wun said that if she knew that somebody was a virgin at the age of 20, she would think that this girl is “hou2 gwaail”, which means a very well-behaved girl. If she knew that somebody was a virgin at the age of 30, she would think that this girl is “hou2 chaam2” which means a poor wretch.

Most of my mainstream informants had their first sexual experience around the age of 18. Sometimes, they noted that even their parents would give them greater freedom after they became adults. It seems that everyone agreed that the definition for adulthood coincided with the legal age of 18. Certainly, people who are 18 or above were granted legal rights and they needed to bear the legal responsibility as adults. But “18” is only an arbitrary age set by the government. The legal age varies among different countries, and obviously people have different mentalities, even if they are of the same age. However, such a legal definition had been extensively applied to daily life and the private sphere in Hong Kong. That is why when asked about the age that people think they are entitled to have sex, all of my informants said “18”, and they thought that people should have the right to choose their own sexual practices.

Nga Wun felt that if a boy found out that his girlfriend was a virgin when they had intercourse, he would treasure her and love her deeply. This is because it proved that the girl had been well-behaved and was willing to give such a precious thing to him. However, in reality, Nga Wun’s loss of virginity did not get her boyfriend’s commitment.

I reluctantly agreed to have sex with my second boyfriend, but I was so unhappy to find out that he secretly dated my classmate. Actually, I knew he was not the right person for me. Maybe I did not reject his request because he was too handsome, and I had not thought he would even date me...Sometimes, I think I would rather give my virginity to my first boyfriend, in remembrance of my first love, the only pure love. That sounds a stupid idea now, but at that time, I really thought I needed to give my virginity to someone who was worth giving it to. After the first time, whether I should have sex with my boyfriend was not a question anymore. Sex was only a mutually manipulative process; you sacrifice something and earn something in return.

After knowing that the second boyfriend could still betray her even if she had lost her virginity because of him, she started to realize that sex was very instrumental. In her later sexual experience, she used sex in a manipulative way.

I thought I was frigid. I only found sex tolerable after the age of 19. Since I didn't enjoy sex very much, I was often very passive. There were times when I wanted to have sex with my boyfriends, but I was only trying to please them. I had had sex with people other than my boyfriends, but usually it was because I was having an ambiguous feeling towards them, or if I had just broken up with my boyfriend, sex could be used as a form of revenge against the boyfriend who dumped me.

When I asked Nga Wun if she had told her parents about her sexual experience, she said that they knew she had boyfriends, so they naturally assumed she would have sex. She would tell them that she was going to spend the night at her boyfriend's place, and that was mutually understood.

We can see that for Nga Wun, it seemed to be very normal to have sex with somebody if she were dating him. She had sex with all of her boyfriends because she felt that “otherwise, how was a romantic relationship different from a friendship?” While Nga Wun used sex as a marker of a dating relationship, Gigi used sex to differentiate her serious relationships from her puppy love. Gigi did not have sex with her young loves because she thought that she did not love them enough:

A sexual relationship should be based on love. You will know if you love him enough to have sex with him.

Gigi felt that sex was acceptable when there was “enough” love. When asked the meaning of enough, she said that she had sex with her boyfriend because she felt that both parties were devoted to the relationship, and they were very serious and would be considered marriageable partners.

Religion

April compared her observations of Britain and Hong Kong. She felt that Christianity was the only deterring factor for premarital sex. So, was religion really as powerful as April suggested?

Nga Wun said that when she was in secondary school, the moral values in society had already perished. She could see her peers having sex casually. So, if the moral values perished and the common practice was to have sex casually, why did Nga Wun consider having sex casually to be an indicator of perished moral values rather than considering it as a normal behavior? Why did she feel proud of her virgin status? Where did Nga Wun get her ideas of what was moral?

Although Nga Wun did not define herself as a Christian, she was clearly influenced by Christianity. Her secondary school was a Christian school, and she was

taught Christian values during her formative years. She said that she would ask for God's help and pray for God's forgiveness in times of crisis. Since she had had premarital sex and was not loyal to God in many respects, Nga Wun did not want to admit that she was a Christian.

Soso defined herself as being a bad Christian. She constantly reviewed herself and believed that she had done something very wrong.

I know what I am doing is not right. It's wrong that I like girls, it's wrong for me to have premarital sex, it's wrong for me to cheat on people and not be loyal enough. Even now, I struggle with this frequently. However, I have to live with my condition. If I can choose, I want to be a male biologically, or I would choose not to be attracted to girls. However, I have been made this way by God. I don't want to challenge God. I just want to ask Him why He has created me, given me this biologically female body, but not the female's mind?

We can see that Soso was very much influenced by the religious doctrines of Christianity. She thought that a person should not have premarital sex, that sexual relationships should be monogamous and life-long, and that people should be heterosexual instead of homosexual, and she felt terrible for committing so many sins.

On the whole, then, the level of love, social expectations, and religion were all influential factors in my informants' attitudes towards sex. Their sexual orientation was another variable that played quite an important role in how my informants would carry out their sexual practices.

Coco had her first sexual experience at the age of 21. Since she was not a believer in any religion, the only barrier preventing her from having sex was her

family. However, she thought that even if she had sex, her family members would not find out because she had always been a well-behaved and obedient girl, and having pre-marital sex would be something out of their imagination. Coco felt that she had sex with her girlfriend a bit faster than she was comfortable with.

We started dating in October and were already having sex in November... I think that was the fourth time I went to her place. I agreed to stay overnight because she was a girl. I thought she might just want my company. But I was also psychologically prepared that she might want [sex]. ... I've read books saying that lesbians were better sex partners than straight guys because they would pay more attention to your feelings, rather than only focus on their own feelings. I was quite curious about how it would be with her.

Sexual orientation

It is important to note that Coco agreed to stay overnight at her girlfriend's place because she was a girl. She thought that if she were a boy, she would definitely reject the idea of staying overnight in a boy's house. For Coco, sleeping with a girl was no big deal as compared to with sleeping with a boy. She also felt that having sex with a girl was no big deal as compared with having sex with a boy. Even though she had had sex with her girlfriend, she could still be able to say to her next boyfriend that she was a virgin to a certain extent.

When I asked if she thought virginity was important, Coco said that "if you love somebody, you won't mind if he or she is a virgin or not." She did not think she would love somebody more if that person was a virgin, and she did not think she had been taken advantage of because her girlfriend was experienced.

I gave my first time to my current girlfriend. Although sometimes I joked that

she needed to be responsible for that, I didn't mean it. But I know that sometimes, some people, especially boys, would be very superficial and ultimately exaggerate the importance of that tiny membrane. If, unluckily, I fell in love with such a kind of boys, I might claim that I am still a virgin, because I wasn't touched by any boys. To that extent, I would be classified as a virgin.

Although Coco claimed that virginity was not important, she remembered her first sexual experience very clearly:

I felt there was something sticky coming out. I thought it was blood, so I went immediately to the washroom to check after we finished. And strangely, there was not even a trace of blood on the tissue. I know that some people would break their hymen while exercising. I learnt to dance and had been able to do splits since I was a little girl, so I suspect that I might have already broken my hymen a long time ago, but I don't remember experiencing any bleeding after a split either. Anyway, I thought it was not as painful as I had imagined, nor did I enjoy it.

I saw blood the next day, and was quite worried, because my girlfriend told me that that might be a sign of inflammation. Luckily, there was no more blood on the following days.

Coco said that she would be classified as a virgin to a certain extent because she had not had sex with any males before. When I asked if she had had sex with a boy, would she say the same thing to her girlfriend that "to a certain extent, I'm a virgin, as I've never been touched by a girl?" She said that's logical, but not convincing. Coco said that once a girl had sex with a boy, she would completely lose her purity, because having sex with boys was a more thorough kind of sex. Coco was actually

trying to say that there are different levels of losing one's virginity — that is, having sex with a girl would allow her to reserve some part of her virginity, while having sex with a boy would be the upper limit, as it could not be reversed. This explained why she had had sex after dating her girlfriend for only a month or so.

Also, from Coco's reaction after her first sexual intercourse with her girlfriend, we can see that she expected there would be blood during her first intercourse and it would be painful. When I asked Coco if she felt that it's worth giving her virginity to her current girlfriend, she said, "As long as we are still together, I would think it's worthwhile. However, if the relationship did not last forever, and I came across better options, I might regret that I had lost my virginity in such an easy way."

Instead of "saving themselves" for a better person or an anticipated marriage, Elaine, Yoyo and Soso imitated traditional male sexual behavior; they would like to have sex with people whom they felt that they loved, and defined such encounters as achievements.

Elaine said that she had sex with all of her girlfriends except for one who refused her every time. When I asked her if they broke up eventually because of the lack of sex, she said, "Of course not. I am not as demanding as you think. Occasional sex would be a good thing, but I can live without sex." When Elaine had sex for the first time with her girlfriend, she said that she knew nothing, nor was her girlfriend experienced. "So, we were exploring together". Later on, in her later relationships, she had been playing the leading role most of the time and guided her girlfriends. However, there were also cases when the other girl took the initiative. In such cases, she said that she would not refuse them:

If they have offered, the only thing I can do is to have them. If you refuse to do so, they will feel hurt for being rejected! Haven't you heard of the saying

'If you take it, you are just a beast; if you refuse to take it, you are not even a beast.'²²,

I then asked if Elaine preferred virgins over non-virgins. She said, "Of course, I only 'take'²³ virgins." I asked how she could be sure that they were virgins, she said, "They told me so, and I trusted them." When I asked if she felt that she had double standards in requiring her girlfriends to be virgins but not herself, she said,

I think they should be thankful that I had taken them. You know, not many people are willing to take "pigs" (a colloquial term for virgins), because nowadays those available pigs are usually pork chops (a colloquial term used to describe ugly, fat women).

We can see that when Elaine talked about her history of having sex with virgins, she used the word "take", as if she had conquered them. Elaine felt proud of having been able to have these women's first time. When she mentioned that nowadays, not many people would take virgins, she was implying that not many people who were still virgins because of sex induced responsibility. By having sex with her virgin girlfriends, Elaine felt that she was doing a heroic deed, because not only was she willing to bear the social responsibility, but she had actually saved the girls from being labeled as "pork chops", which was socially undesirable.

For the above two reasons, Elaine said that she did not think she was taking advantage of her virgin girlfriends. She also disagreed that she was having double standards, because she thought that she herself could be classified as a virgin too. Of this, she said, "I have never been penetrated. I have only penetrated them".

Elaine also expressed that she would not accept her ex-girlfriend because after they broke up, that girl had sex with a man. Elaine admitted that she would feel

²² Original wording in Chinese 「食，你就是禽獸，唔食，你連禽獸都不如」

²³ Original wording in Chinese 「食」

better if her ex-girlfriend had slept with other women because she thought that sleeping with another woman was a form of betrayal, while sleeping with another man was betrayal, as well as losing her sexual purity.

While Elaine believed that sex was not a necessity in an intimate relationship, Nga Wun thought that sex was not even necessary within a marriage. When I asked Nga Wun how she would feel if her husband was not interested in sex, she said that she would suspect that he was having a mistress. I asked what if the husband was really not interested in having sex, he might be impotent, so that after giving birth to one or two children, he felt that he had his job completed. Nga Wun responded “Wow, that’s scarce and praiseworthy!”²⁴ This means that she did not mind, and would even feel happy if her marriage were sexless.

Conclusion

Social institutions exist to regulate the ways people act or think. For example, the family acts as a panopticon to prevent illegitimate sex from occurring, and religious traditions guide people in how they should behave. Age acts as a marker to legitimize socially expected behavior, and peer influence forms a major frame of reference. However, the experience of living abroad or living in a hostel enables individuals to break away from the physical control of the family and allows a certain degree of freedom in terms of sexual practice.

From my informants’ discussions about virginity, it is not difficult to find that they believed that marriage was not the reason to have sex. People would not get married for sex and would not have sex just because they were married. When the bonding between marriage and sex was absolute, as was formerly the case, people

²⁴ Original wording in Chinsese 「哇! 好難得啊!」

tried to make sense of their lives by joining the two separate institutions. From my informants' examples, we can see that love acted as a new form of value to join the two institutions together. Love legitimated both marriage and sex, and that is why all the informants in this group talked about "love". Although "love" acted as the magic incantation to open the gate to sex, we can see that my mainstream informants were not content with the status of being loved and being sexually active. This is because they assumed that such relationships might end at any time. These mainstream informants, despite differences in age, education, religion and sexual orientation, all wished to have relationships that were monogamous and long-lasting. Even if they claimed that they were not sure about getting married, they still wished to achieve something equivalent to "marriage". While my "moralist" informants emphasized the importance of marriage to legitimize sex, my mainstream informants thought that "love" was the most crucial factor. It seems that they were quite different from the moralists in the way that they would have pre-marital sex out of "love", but actually embracing the idea of "love" was not a radical ideological change. Love is actually an ambiguous idea that includes sex on the one hand and marriage on the other. By embracing both natures of love, "love" enabled the mainstreams to start with sex and end in marriage.

Chapter 4 The Radicals

“You go and have sex with other people who also want to have sex. It’s like when you are hungry, you have to eat.” Viva, 25, Master’s student.

Introduction

In Chapter Three, I discussed informants who believed that love should be the pre-requisite for sex. In this chapter, I am going to present data on those who believed that sex was not necessarily an expression of love. They thought that sexual desire was something natural and needed to be entertained. Thus, they believed that it was okay to have sex with someone they did not love. I call this group of informants “radicals” because in Hong Kong their ideas about sex would definitely be described as “open” and “courageous”.

The “radicals” not only believe that sex could be occasionally disconnected with love. They also claimed that sex had nothing to do with marriage. They did not think that having premarital sex was a problem, and they disliked the idea that sex had always been associated with morality.

In the following discussion, I will illustrate how my “radical” informants interpreted love, sex and marriage, and how they made sense of their lives despite the fact that most people in Hong Kong society did not believe in the same values as they did. I will show how they tried to distance themselves from “the mundane masses” through establishing “an elite class” based on their “thorough” understanding of sexuality, acquired from extensive sexual experience or from books. Instead of embracing the concept of virginity, they did not feel virginity was a big

deal. They legitimated their ideas by emphasizing that they were the group who knew the most, and possessed expert knowledge, and thus cultural capital.

Growing up and learning about sex

There are five informants who fall into the “radical” category. The table below shows their socioeconomic characteristics

Table 4.1 “Radical” Informants

Informants (pseudonyms)	Age	Education	Religion	Sexual Orientation
Viva	25	Doing a Master’s Degree	None	Homosexual
Flora	25	Bachelor’s Degree	None	Heterosexual
Keikei	26	Higher Diploma	None	Homosexual
Celine	27	Master’s Degree	Christian	Heterosexual
Ah Wing	28	Doing doctoral degree	Christian	Heterosexual (Had previous homosexual relationships)

Here is a list of my radical informants

Looking at this group of informants, we will immediately find that the age range is very narrow. All of them were between 25 and 28, and thus belonged to the same generation. Two of them had master’s degrees, and three of them had homosexual orientations. Their average level of education was comparatively higher than the other two groups of informants.

Ah Wing was 28 and was doing a PhD program. Before she was enrolled in the program, she taught part-time in a secondary school. She once had same-sex partners, but now believed that heterosexual relationships were more suitable for her. She told me that one of the reasons for her to choose boys over girls now was because she

found that having sex with boys was more fulfilling, and more fun as there was “more stuff you can play with”. From her outspoken views, it was quite difficult to imagine that she came from a very conservative family. Her parents were both Catholics, and she went to church with them regularly from the time she was very small. When she was studying in kindergarten, she thought that human beings were miracles created by God, and that bringing a new life to Earth was the most meaningful and sacred job she could think of. Thus, she wished to become an obstetrician. Like many Chinese parents who wished for their kids to become successful, Ah Wing’s parents adored her ambition of becoming a medical doctor. They supported her dream by buying her thick medical books, including those on sex and reproduction. Thus, unlike children from typical Chinese families, Ah Wing was allowed to look at pictures of nude males and females, and of the reproductive organs of both sexes, and she had the chance to learn about the process of copulation even before she entered primary school. Around the age of seven, she already had an idea of what sex was. At that time, her imagination about sex was that “it would be painful for the first time, but afterwards, it would be ecstatic.”

Ah Wing studied hard in her primary school to prepare for her dream of becoming an obstetrician. She was able to get into a prestigious Band One²⁵ secondary school run by the Catholic Church. However, she disliked the way that the teachers interpreted religion. For example, according to some of her teachers, only people who believed in God could be considered to be good people, which did not make any sense to Ah Wing. She went on to read philosophy books on her own, and felt that religion should not be the only element to build a person’s value system, and there should not be only one interpretation of religion. She also hated the fact that

²⁵ When my informant was studying in secondary school, all secondary schools in Hong Kong were divided into five bands according to the students’ academic performance. Band One schools were the best batch of schools.

some teachers at her school were trying to control everything. For example, one of the teachers would tell students not to drink orange juice at parties, as people could put hallucinogens in the drink. Her response to this was: "Come on! If orange juice were dangerous, then anything could be dangerous." She became rebellious when she realized how nonsensical her teachers could be, and in the interview, she was constantly teasing her teachers for their old-fashioned and dogmatic perspectives.

Ah Wing also had a rather negative impression of Christianity, as she found that there were many "trashy people" in the fellowships. She said some of them would use the fellowship as a means to find girlfriends, while others used the fellowship as a means to earn profit. "There were sales agents coming to fellowships, as this gave them a chance to meet more people, making it easier for them to sell their products. The Fellowship was a means of establishing their social network. By emphasizing they were Christians thus not liars, they fooled people into falling for their traps."

When she turned seventeen, she met a girl who was a Catholic. This girl was "beautiful, clever, and gentle, while at the same time, she had a critical mind." Ah Wing still remembered that the girl wore mini-skirts to church, which inspired her that she could be a Catholic without being rigid and dogmatic, so Ah Wing became a believer of Catholicism. However after the conversion, Ah Wing felt that being a Catholic seemed to be not too different from being a Protestant. She found that she needed to really dwell into religion in order to distinguish herself from Protestants, and she began to think about becoming a nun.

After entering secondary school, Ah Wing found herself more interested in arts subjects, especially literature. However, choosing the arts stream meant that she would have no chance to become an obstetrician. This is because, in Hong Kong, in order to enter the medical school, the applicant needs to study advanced level

chemistry as a prerequisite. Choosing the arts stream means not being able to study chemistry, and as a result, not able to go to medical school. After realizing that she would lose her chance of doing her most cherished job, she had another plan for her future career. She wished to become a nun, and thought that becoming a nun could be a more direct way to dedicate herself to God and spend a meaningful life.

In the end, Ah Wing did not become a nun, as she became critical of her religious beliefs. However, she admitted that it was quite impossible for her to get rid of the religious socialization that she had received throughout her childhood. She felt that her religious background was almost in-born and that she could not be perfectly objective in her way of thinking. She believed that her way of seeing the world was always affected by her religion.

When Bourdieu studied academia, he found that one's own reputation or distinction could be set up at the expense of another's. For example, he mentions three ways of talking. First, there is "labeling" which he characterizes as a subtle mode of academic abuse. "Labeling — whether it be one's categorization as a 'functionalist', 'determinist', 'Marxist', 'structuralist', 'rational action theorist', or whatever — is," says Bourdieu, "the 'scholarly' equivalent of the insult...both more of a stigma and more imprecise, thus irrefutable" (Jenkins 1992: 160). Similarly, by labeling her school teachers and many others as "dogmatic", "old-school", and "conventional", Ah Wing was trying to use this verbal weapon as qualifiers so that "[t]he critic is spared the necessity of a detailed critique, while the victim is left to respond to an attack which derives much of its force from its relatively insubstantial elusiveness" (Jenkins 1992: 160).

The second informant in this group is Celine. Celine was a 27-year-old heterosexual female. After getting her master's degree, Celine worked in a job

related to statistics. She was a Christian, and was baptized because her mother was also baptized. However she would not introduce herself to others as a Christian. She thought that she was doing things that a Christian should not do. Celine behaved like a good girl in front of her parents and most of her friends. Thus, very few people knew that she had had premarital sex with her boyfriends and even had a one-night-stand with one of her colleagues. As the only child in the family, Celine had seen her parents always arguing and even physically fighting with each other. However neither of her parents would agree to a divorce because they did not want to bear the social stigma associated with divorced people, or the other negative consequences of a divorce such as taking turns to visit the children. It seemed to her that her parents kept torturing each other in their marriage, thus she thought that cohabitation should be a better lifestyle than getting formally married. She said that she would advise everyone to move in with their partners rather than getting married, and she said if she had a daughter, she would definitely ask her to at least try cohabitation with her boyfriend before getting married. She thought that living together should not only be socially accepted, it should in fact be encouraged because there were so many benefits.

For Celine, having sex before marriage not only enabled her to check if her partner had any sexual dysfunctions, but also enabled her to see his true personality. As she said, “People say when you play mahjong, there is something called ‘paai4 ban’,²⁶ I think this also applies to sex — there is something called ‘chong4 ban2’.²⁷ That is, you can find out someone’s real personality from what he or she does in bed. While having sex with a person, you will be able to see if a person is selfish and only

²⁶ 牌品, literally translated as the ‘virtues while playing card games’ which means you can view the real personality of someone while playing mahjong with him or her. This is because a person’s dark side will be exposed when there is a conflict of interest.

²⁷ 床品, originally means bed linen, here my informants implies the virtues while having sex.

cares about how he himself feels, rather than being considerate and caring about how you feel. People may be hypocritical and put on a mask most of the time, but they cannot pretend to be decent while having sex with you. This is especially true for men, because they are driven by their sexual urges and cannot be totally rational.”

The third informant, Keikei, was a 26-year-old lesbian. She had a job in estates management. Most of her friends knew her sexual orientation, but she never revealed her homosexuality to her parents. She told me that at one stage, she had a life of wild orgies: At that time, she went to bars frequently, had one night stands with girls she met at the bar, and even had dated four girlfriends at one time. She was still quite proud of one particular experience in which two sisters both liked her, and fought with each other when competing for her attention. However, she found it was too time consuming to have such complicated relationships with her girlfriends, and she got tired of such a lifestyle. By the time I interviewed her, she was in a monogamous relationship with her girlfriend. They lived together, and she considered the relationship to be stable and comfortable, and hoped it would be long-lasting.

When she was in secondary school, Keikei was a member of the school's martial arts team. She had won many awards in inter-school martial arts competitions and always needed to perform in school assemblies. In addition to martial arts, she was also excellent in many other sports as well, such as swimming, and track and field. Thus, she was more or less a super idol and had many fans at school. At that time, she was not aware that she liked girls, but only knew that many girls admired her. She was used to being surrounded by and adored by girls, and when one of her fans proposed to have a romantic relationship with her, she did not refuse, as she thought she would accept any relationship as long as she felt comfortable.

The fourth informant, Viva, was a 25-year-old lesbian. She took up free-lance

jobs after completing her bachelor's degree, and was doing a master's degree when I interviewed her. Viva's parents divorced when she was two years old, so she only had a very vague impression of what her biological father was like. When Viva was in Primary Two, her mother remarried, later on giving birth to Viva's younger sister. Viva then lived with her mother, stepfather and half-sister. She considered her family income to be middle-class.

Viva studied in a girls' secondary school. She knew that she liked girls from the time she was in Form Three. While other classmates were discussing the boys in other schools, she found her own classmates much more appealing. At that time, Viva had very short hair and liked to wear very boyish outfits. She thought that "you have to be either a TB or a TBG²⁸ if you are a lesbian." However, in recent years, she realized that she did not need to pretend to be a boy in order to like girls. She would wear a dress and high heels if the occasion required. She sometimes put on makeup, and wore bikinis. After such changes in her fashion choice, her mother thought that she had turned "straight". However, Viva thought that having a more feminine appearance had nothing to do with her sexual orientation. Viva thought that one of the key reasons for why her mother did not oppose her having girlfriends was because she thought Viva was still very young and was not ready to settle down. "My mom believed that I would eventually choose a man, thus she was not too worried."

In fact, her mother seemed to be less worried after she knew that Viva only dated girls. Before knowing Viva's sexual orientation, she had always warned Viva to take safety precautions while having sex, as she worried about Viva having an unwanted pregnancy. Viva remembered that her mother would always say things like, "you can do whatever you want, but you must be careful. In the case of anything

²⁸ TB means "Tom Boy": a person who plays the more masculine role in a homosexual relationship between two females. TBG means "Tom Boy's girlfriend": the more feminine character of the two females in a homosexual relationship.

happening, the losers are always the girls.” Viva thought that her mother was trying to tell her “safe sex is good sex.” However, she did not worry about getting pregnant. “I’m not dating boys, so there is nothing to lose²⁹”. But later on, after she went to university, she started to worry about sexually transmitted diseases. Instead of changing her sexual practices, she decided to have hepatitis B vaccinations and regular health checks for AIDS.

Most of Viva’s friends knew about her sexual orientation and her relationships with other girls. However, Viva did not come out in front of her grandparents. She said that people of one generation older than her would still understand her; people of two generations older would not be able to imagine it, let alone accepting her homosexual relationships.

All of Viva’s romantic relationships lasted less than one and a half years. One of the reasons was because she found it was really difficult for her to not get bored in a relationship. She believed that the main reason for her to break up with her ex-girlfriends was because they were “too girly” and expected Viva to be really masculine. They expected her to pay the bills, to open the door for them, to carry heavy stuff, and to make every decision when they were together. She felt this was very unfair. “If you are a woman and deserve to be adored, then so do I!”³⁰ She found that her dating relationships would last longer if the girl were less dependent on and demanding of her. The relationship would last when both would give and take, rather than always expecting Viva to make concessions.

The fifth informant was Flora. She was 25 when I interviewed her. She had a series of part-time jobs, and her main source of income was from an online retail business that she owned. She lived with her parents and her siblings in private

²⁹ Original wording “又唔係同男仔拍拖, 有咩蝕底?”

³⁰ Original wording “你係女人, 要人乜, 我唔係呀!”

housing. Flora described her economic status as middle class, meaning “you don’t need to worry about food and clothing”³¹. Flora thought that her parents had a very good marital relationship, as she had never seen them arguing. They were always joking with each other, though they would never display affection in front of their children.

Flora attended a Christian kindergarten and primary school. She had also joined a fellowship that her volleyball and badminton friends attended. However, she did not believe in the Bible stories she heard. Regarding the “five loaves, two fish” story, for example, she said, “I don’t think two fish can feed so many people... nonsense!”, and she did not believe in the virgin birth that was supposed to explain the birth of Jesus by the Virgin Mary.

By the time Flora was a Secondary One student, she had started dating. She mingled with a group of so-called “bad” students who did not have good academic results, and did not pay attention in class. All of these friends of hers were having romantic relationships with their schoolmates. So Flora thought that dating somebody was not a big deal. She thought, “if others have boyfriends, I also need to have a boyfriend.”

Like Ah Wing, Flora said that somehow she understood what sex was rather early in life. However, she did not remember where she learned about sex. She remembered that the primary school textbooks only taught them how to use sanitary napkins. Apart from that, she did not think that there was any kind of formal sex education at school. Most of her knowledge about sex was from magazines such as

³¹ Original wording “衣食無憂”

Easy Finder and YES.³²

In order to understand why my radical informants became “radical”, I asked them about their dating experiences.

Marriage

Ah Wing believed that marriage and love need not be associated. She said that she would get married for practical reasons, rather than for love or for sex. “Marriage is usually about being mutually beneficial; this does not mean that I need to love the person I marry.”

I asked Ah Wing why she would still bother to get married with somebody if that person was not the person she loved, nor was he sexually skillful. Ah Wing’s answer showed that marriage, in her mind, was something to ensure her legal status. She felt that, as a woman, she had “primitive” desires of constructing and consolidating her status by establishing a well-defined relationship with a male, and in Hong Kong, this can only be done by getting a marriage backed by law. Ah Wing would not consider three types of people as potential partners: men who were divorced, men who had kids, and men who had sexually transmitted diseases. To her, being divorced means that a man is a “second hand product”. A man with kids would mean that the man would have a blood bond which cannot be ceased, and Ah Wing would have to engage in a complicated relationship, or even share the man with some

³² *Easy Finder* is a magazine published in September 1991 that was famous for “yellow journalism” and covering a lot of sensitive topics, such as sex, drugs, crime, prostitutions. The magazine used a lot of Cantonese colloquial expressions, with a heavy coverage of entertainment news which undoubtedly attracted young readers.

Yes! Magazine was first published in November 1990, and is popular among students. It covers mainly the hottest trends in fashion, music, movies and pop stars, and has a slogan of being the “All-weather Youth Magazine” (全天候年輕人雜誌).

other woman or children after he had married her.

Ah Wing thought that the perfect situation would be this: she would get married to someone who was very responsible, date the person she loved the most, and have sex with yet another who was sexually experienced and skillful. It would be best to have one single person who could fulfill all of her requirements, and who could perform well in all three aspects. In that case, she would definitely be loyal to that person, rather than looking for someone else. “However, it is sad that this is very unlikely to happen; I haven’t met such perfect people.”

Celine believed that marriage is the graveyard of a romantic relationship:

After getting married, most people will have more things to worry about, and arguments will arise out of trivial matters. I think cohabitating is the best way to maintain a relationship. You live with the person you like, but that person cannot take you for granted, because you do not have any obligations to stay with him or her for the rest of your life. You can have your own social life, rather than having your life be centered on the other half.

Celine thought that the only reason for people to get married was if they planned to have children:

You should be responsible parents and protect the rights of your children by placing them within a legitimate relationship. I think nowadays, most people would get married when they plan to have kids, or when they accidentally get pregnant.

Keikei believed that she would never be able to get married due to her sexual orientation; however, she thought that this would not affect her relationships with her girlfriends. This is because she thought that marriage was simply a ritual. “The marriage certificate is just a piece of paper. I don’t think my life with my girlfriend

would be any different if they (society) gave us a marriage certificate.” For Keikei, the relationship would last if both parties communicate well, and both enjoy being together with the other person. To her, there was no need to get married in order to have a stable relationship.

Similarly, Viva did not think that she would get married, even if homosexual marriage were legalized in Hong Kong. She argued,

What’s the point of getting married if you are just going to get divorced?³³ If you really want to stay together with that person, you will be together even if you are not married. If you don’t want to be with that person, even if you are married, you can get a divorce easily. So, why bother to get married?

Flora was the only informant in this group who confessed that she was longing for a marriage relationship. She hoped that she would get married before she turned thirty. She thought that marriage, for a woman was as important as her career. Flora said that in Primary Four or Five, when the teacher asked the class to write about their dream careers, she wanted to write about becoming a sex worker. Flora said that she was extremely lazy, and she thought since sex workers earn money by simply lying in bed, it would be a suitable job for her. However, she did not dare to write sex worker as her dream career because she vaguely felt that sex worker was something perceived negatively, and she feared that her teacher would ask her to re-do the essay. Later on, when she started dating boys, she gave up the idea of becoming a sex worker, as she had a clearer understanding of how sex workers were stigmatized in society. She knew that if she really became a sex worker, it might affect her relationship with her family. Additionally, her boyfriends might dislike her for doing such a job, or she might contract sexually transmitted diseases or have unwanted

³³ Original wording “結婚，結完就分，結來做咩?”

pregnancies. As a result, she gave up on this “dream” job. After she gave up her dream of becoming a prostitute, she started to long for a marriage. She believed that marriage was a form of safe, legitimate, and long-term prostitution, in which the woman would get what she needed by providing sexual pleasure for her husband. There is a basket of requirements that her potential husband needed to fulfill:

He must be taller than me, treat me nicely, and there is no need for him to be rich, but if he earned less than me, he would have low self esteem and the relationship would not last long. This is especially true for Chinese men who need to have face. A friend of mine said that I only hang out with rich guys! That made me very angry, it’s not true! I’m just being reasonable.

However, later on, she mentioned that marriage would provide more security for a woman like herself, as she could get half of her husband’s money if the man wished to divorce her. From this, we can see that although she said that her partner need not to be rich, it was quite certain that she would not marry someone who was of a lower socio-economic status than herself. She added,

I don’t need to love that person at first, because if you are good to me, I will love you. Love can be “cultivated”.³⁴ I’d choose a person that matches me well sexually, rather than a man that I loved a great deal, but who was not sexually compatible.

She said that life experience, including sexual experience of a man, made him attractive, and earning less than a woman would result in conflicts in the family. Flora would not oppose her husband from taking mistresses. This was not because it could justify her taking up a lover of her own, but rather, her idea was that as long as her husband were capable of handling more than one woman, she would allow him to

³⁴ Original wording “愛情是可以‘培養’的.”

do so. She defined the term “capable” as giving her enough attention and money, so that she would maintain a reasonable living standard.

It seems that all of my informants in this group except Flora thought that marriage was not a thing that everyone had to go through. However, this does not mean that they thought marriage was unimportant.

From Ah Wing’s view about marriage, we can see that she believed that marriage was something that allowed a relationship to be legally recognized. She thought that women needed to have certain relationships established with men. And such desire was “primitive” and “natural”, and thus could not be explained. That is to say, she agreed that women needed to be married in order to prove legitimize their status.

Although she said that marriage need not have any correlation with love or sex, she would definitely get married with a person who loved her, who at the same time was skillful in sex, and was willing to commit to a long-term relationship. So she was not getting married because she had not found such a perfect person yet.

Ah Wing also mentioned that if she could choose, she would refuse a divorced man from being her partner. This clearly showed that Ah Wing believed that if people had entered into a marital relationship, they should be serious about it and should not get a divorce. Otherwise, if she thought that marriage would be short-term, she would not exclude a man who had married from the list of her potential marriage partners. She seemed to sub-consciously harbor the conventional belief that marriage should be life-long, although she tried to build an image of having unconventional ideas about marriage.

Celine, Keikei and Viva all refused the idea of getting married. On the surface, it seems that they did not support the marriage system. However, if we look more

closely, we will find that they only preferred cohabitation without being legally married; this is because they did not want to abuse the marriage system. That is, if they were not sure that the marriage would be a life-long relationship, they would not enter into it lightly.

Most of the informants in this group mentioned that marriage would not serve to make sure that a relationship would be long-lasting. They were disappointed by the problems and difficulties involved in maintaining a marriage relationship nowadays. Thus the unspoken reason behind their resistance to marriage was their perfectionist expectations and hence, like the “moralists” and the “mainstreams”, they are faithful supporters of the marriage system. Unlike the “moralists” and the “mainstreams”, they wish to deny the correlation between sex and marriage because they feel they are not qualified for the marriage system, but do not want to be deprived of the right to have sex.

Sex

Ah Wing mentioned that at age seventeen, she had hoped to observe celibacy and become a nun; however, after entering university, she felt that her body had transformed and she could feel her own sexual desire. She dated a boy for the first time and believed that love should be platonic. She looked for spiritual compatibility in a relationship and thought that the person she loved must be able to communicate with her in depth. At first, she thought that she and her first boyfriend could achieve that ideal. However as the relationship went along, they became more intimate not only spiritually, but also physically. At one point, they almost had sexual intercourse, but the boyfriend held back, giving the reason that he respected Ah Wing’s religious sentiments. However, Ah Wing thought that he did not really understand her. She

criticized him for being too conventional because he did not have the guts to challenge the dominant moral code and he was only being selfish as he tried to keep his own decent image. They eventually broke up and Ah Wing immediately started dating other boys.

She had sex with her second boyfriend and they broke up within half a year. According to Ah Wing, the boy was very ugly and she would not believe that he betrayed her and had an affair with another girl. After this incident, Ah Wing felt that she too need not be loyal to only one partner. She realized that there was nothing wrong with having more than one boyfriend at a time. She reasoned that although it was not the norm in Hong Kong, this was legitimate and quite common in other places. As a form of revenge against her two former boyfriends, Ah Wing started having multiple partners, and the idea of saving her virginity for someone special sounded like a joke to her. This was because she had lost her virginity to her second boyfriend, but there was nothing special about the way he treated her. Giving somebody her virginity did not bring anything in return.

Now, Ah Wing thought that a quality sex life would be the best thing to keep a woman healthy and youthful; a quality sex life was also part of a quality relationship. She enjoyed having sex with different partners and enjoyed being single. She planned to settle down and have a kid of her own in her thirties, so she would make good use of her freedom and have fun in the mean time.

Ah Wing said she would not talk about her sexual experiences with her family unless they asked her directly — which was unlikely to happen. However, she would freely share her sex experience with a group of friends who would not question her relationships. As most of these friends were open-minded and might have similar sexual or romantic experiences, they reinforced each other's beliefs about sex

through their everyday interactions.

Celine had wished for a romantic relationship from the time she was very small. She explained that this might be because she was deprived of love and intimacy at home. Her father was fourteen years older than her mother, and her parents always quarreled and fought with each other. Celine wanted a man who could give her a warm relationship to start a family as early as possible. She started dating at the age of fourteen, and the first relationship lasted for three years.

Celine had her first sexual experience with her first boyfriend at the age of sixteen, in which the boy had taken the initiative. At that time, Celine thought that having sex was very dirty, especially oral sex, which her boyfriend requested her to perform. She wondered why dating could not be a simple thing, and why it had to involve sex at all.

Celine did not enjoy her sexual experiences with her first boyfriend. This was partly because she was not ready for sex and partly because she did not like his techniques in bed. Celine broke up with him at the age of 17 when she found out he was dating another girl. After breaking up with her first boyfriend, Celine became involved in another relationship. She said that they were very intimate, as they kissed and hugged each other, but she would not define him as her boyfriend. The experience of being cheated on in her first relationship hurt her badly and she did not want to be hurt again. At the age of 18, however, she recovered from the trauma, and started dating her second boyfriend, and enjoyed having sex with him regularly. She thought he had better skills, and at the same time, her body had become more mature. She recalled having sexual desire at the age of 18 or 19, and her impression towards sex became less negative. Celine later on dated several men from different countries, such as Norway, Korea and Japan. However she would not tell her second boyfriend

about this. Nor did she tell her family about her sexual experiences. At the time I interviewed her, Celine believed that her mother still thought she was a virgin.

Bourdieu discusses the idea of hierarchies of legitimacy in *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (Bourdieu 1984: 86–89) where people's judgments are defined by legitimate authorities such as universities, books, and intellectual ability. In Ah Wing's case, we can see that she was proud of her critical thinking ability, such as not believing in the dominant social ideology, and thought that her idea of having multiple partners was not too bizarre because she had read about it in books. She argued that if it was "documented in books" and that this was a legitimate way of life for people in other parts of the world, then it should be acceptable elsewhere. It is quite obvious that Ah Wing used the books she read, as well as her critical thinking ability, as legitimate authorities to justify her ideas about sex.

Similarly, Celine also used her intellectual knowledge to gain legitimacy. Celine had mentioned that she would make use of her role as a researcher when she questioned men about sex. She would use more "formal" wordings such as "sexual behavior" rather than "make love". She believed that the men would not challenge her or harass her if she maintained an academic guise. Like Bourdieu's discussion (1991), language has always been used for cultural distinction. Language, education and culture assumption are not separate enterprises. From Celine and Ah Wing's examples, we can see how legitimacy is achieved by the manipulation of symbolic and cultural resources.

Unlike other informants in this group, Flora was not very tolerant towards homosexuality. She defined a sexual relationship as the insertion of a male's penis into a female's vagina. "I'm one hundred percent straight. I think a sexual relationship has to be the relationship between two sexes." Under her definition, all

lesbians and gays would be virgins, and oral sex would not be counted as sexual experience.

Flora started dating as a Form One student. However, she defined all of her relationships before Form Four as “puppy love”. The reason was because the durations of such relationships were all relatively short. They lasted from a couple of weeks to a couple of months. She also thought they were not serious relationships because the degree of intimacy was different from her later relationships —she and her dates only held hands and kissed.

In Form Three, the girl who was sitting behind Flora told her that she had been to bars and had one-night-stands with strangers. Flora was quite astonished to learn that, however, she did not think that the girl was doing anything wrong. She felt that the girl was just easy-going.

Flora’s first sexual experience was in Form Five, at her boyfriend’s place. They had been dating each other for almost one year, and when her boyfriend invited her to his house, Flora expected something to happen. “He lived in Sai Wan and I lived in Fan Ling,³⁵ so I wouldn’t go to his place for no reason. He kind of informed me what he would do through the phone, and when I arrived, it happened”. When I asked why she had agreed to let it happen, she said that, “Of course we want to try [sex] upon reaching a certain age. And we’ve been dating for so long.”

Recalling her first sexual experience, Flora told me that it was unexpectedly “nothing”,³⁶— she did not feel any pain, nor did she enjoy the process. The only thing she remembered was that she was wearing a pair of blue shoes. She told me that everyone would have their first time, sooner or later, thus it did not matter.

³⁵ It takes more than an hour by public transport to get to Sai Wan on Hong Kong Island from Fan Ling in the New Territories.

³⁶ Original wording “無嘢”, meaning “nothing special” or “no big deal”.

It is clear that Flora, in this case, wished to express the message that virginity was not a big deal for her; however, when I asked about the second boyfriend who had sex with her, she said, “Ah, I think once it’s lost, it’s lost. After being deflowered, the second, third, fourth time doesn’t make any difference.”

Flora had sex with her second boyfriend because she found his body figure very appealing. However they only dated for a short period and soon broke up. “I think we only had sex one or two times and then stopped contacting each other.” In contrast, Flora’s third relationship lasted for four years, and after breaking up with that boyfriend, she dated another guy in order to have someone occupying her time, so that she could forget about her third boyfriend more quickly. Then she told me about the three relationships that were more recent. One was a relationship with a French guy and another was with an Australian guy, and then an Indian guy that she was dating when I interviewed her.

It seems that recently Flora changed her taste and started dating foreigners. So I asked her if she enjoyed dating foreigners more than locals. She instantly said she enjoyed dating foreigners more:

I can communicate better with Chinese [men], but Chinese like to tell lies, for example... face really matters to Chinese guys and they will lie to you about trivial stuff. Chinese would pretend to like you, they won’t tell you their true feelings, so that you will keep sacrificing yourself for them, until they have found another person. Also, sexually, foreigners are better.

I asked Flora to rank a list of men ³⁷ in terms of her willingness to date them. She felt that she did not want to be the third person and destroy a couple’s marriage,

³⁷ The list includes various kinds of men, such as a man who has visited prostitutes, a man who had one-night-stands, a man who had married before, a man who had divorced and now living with her ex-wife’s child/children, a man now in a marriage relationship, and a man who has not had any sexual experience.

so she first eliminated the man who was still with his wife. To my surprise, the second person she eliminated from the list was the man who has not had any sexual experience, and her justification was, "Experience makes a man more attractive". She said she did not want to be the leading person during sexual intercourse.

She said that now she was quite open-minded in accepting all kinds of people with different sexual or marriage histories. If I had asked her earlier, she might have also eliminated the divorced man; however, after dating her current boyfriend who was a divorced man, she felt that she should not be biased towards people who were divorced. She used her boyfriend's case as an example:

His previous marriage was arranged by his parents, and he had seen his ex-wife only once before he was asked to marry her. In such case, how can I blame him for not loving his wife?

Flora also told me that her third boyfriend was addicted to sex and was a frequent customer of prostitutes, yet she still found him attractive:

He felt that he could not control himself....He borrowed hundreds of thousands dollars from others, because he spent too much paying the prostitutes.

I asked if Flora knew he was such a person before dating him, she said:

Of course, we were friends. If you asked me earlier, I might think I would not date a person who had had one-night-stands or had visited prostitutes, but [now] with my record of dating this boyfriend, I don't think that matters.

It seemed that Flora was willing to embrace all kinds of people and was open to all forms of sexual experience, but that is not the case. She stated very clearly that she did not consider oral sex as real sex but merely as a kind of foreplay, and that only vaginal sex was real sex. Flora rejected the idea of anal sex and did not like SM:

The French guy was too “open” (豪放), though we never had real sex, by that I mean vaginal sex, but we had all of the other forms. He used tools and liked SM, but I didn’t like those. I did feel good [when I had sex with him], and still think that was a special experience. But I’m afraid I would get addicted to such forms of love-making and lifestyles.

When I asked her if she had found any of her relationships special, she told me one particular person who she addressed as her “elder brother”:

I don’t know if you would find this relationship interesting. I had this good friend, and we continue to be good friends even now. Now he is married, and his wife hates me badly. We were very intimate, and for a long time, I think from Form Three till Year One [in university]. We talked about everything, we hugged often, and we slept together. Sometimes, we were nearly naked when we were sleeping. He would hold me around my waist, or touching my breasts, and I could feel his penis turning turgid. However, we never had any sexual intercourse.

With the absence of sexual intimacy, Flora did not consider this relationship as dating, although she thought that the “elder brother” really cared about her. Thus I asked if she had had sex with anybody that she was not dating, and she told me another story.

Ah-ha, with my third boyfriend! I was with him for four years from [age] 18 to 22, the best time of a woman. But we kept contact and were [only] friends. We broke up because he told me that he didn’t like me anymore. Since he was so addicted to sex, I asked him if he wanted to make love with me or not. I did not need him to really do that, I only needed him to answer, “Yes, I want to”. So every time when I tried to flirt with him and turned him on, I felt that

I've gained the upper hand. It's like, "You were saying you don't like me anymore, and now you want me?"

It was quite clear that Flora wished to express that virginity did not really matter to her. That is why she would rather choose a man who had visited prostitutes than a man who did not have any sexual experience. However, at the same time, she became more easy-going toward sex after she lost her virginity. On the one hand, she was saying virginity was not important, on the other hand, she told me that the first time with every boyfriend should be special. She said that the first sexual experience with each boyfriend was special because it must be within the context of dating each other. However, later on, the second, third or fourth time would be out of such context. Flora also wished to be as "pure" as a virgin every time she met a new boyfriend, but she knew that she was not a virgin, thus she tried to comfort herself and make herself believe that virginity was not important. That is why she consciously mentioned in the interview that virginity was not important. She also needed to prove her attractiveness, and that was why she thought she had won if she succeeded in luring her third boyfriend to have sex with her. Because, by agreeing to have sex with her, he was confessing that he found her irresistible.

Although she had had having sex with many men, none of them had accused her of being promiscuous, because she would always be able to find a way to tease them back. Flora avoided dating people with whom she had common friends, so that after breaking up, their stories would not be spread within their friends' circle. She needed to have the control over what she wanted the audience to know. She mentioned that she reached orgasm every time she masturbated, but enjoyed having sex with males more, even it did not bring her an orgasmic experience every time. This is because she valued pleasure generated from having the "upper hand" by men wanting her

sexuality; her value was gained by men wanting her body.

Viva estimated that she had had 15 girlfriends altogether. Her first dating relationship started while she was in Form Four or Form Five. She met that girl in an Internet chatroom, who was two years younger than her. They always argued, and they broke up within half a year. Viva's second girlfriend was a friend of her friend's. They were introduced to each other because they were born on exactly the same day. According to Viva, they dated each other "for no reason"³⁸, and again in less than half a year they broke up because they also argued with each other frequently. The third relationship started when Viva was doing her A-levels³⁹. This relationship also lasted for about half a year. All other relationships lasted for less than six months except the one with the "current" girlfriend. By the time I interviewed Viva, she had been together with this girlfriend for almost one and a half years. Viva felt that when the relationship lasted this long, they became like companions, rather than lovers. She felt that they were too used to the presence of each other, but the passion between them had gone.

One of the indexes of passion for Viva was the frequency of sexual intercourse. Viva told me that at first, they made love several times a week. Now, they did it only once a month. Viva thought that her girlfriend's parents knew about their relationship, but as typical Chinese parents, as long as they did not see it for themselves, they would avoid saying anything.

Similarly, Viva's family knew about her homosexual orientation, but would not discuss it. Her mother acquiesced to the fact that Viva liked girls and had sex with them. She would occasionally drop a hint by asking Viva when she would have a

³⁸ Original wording "無端端拍左拖".

³⁹ A-level means Advanced Level Examinations, which takes place after Form Seven. Students would normally have to start preparing for the Exam in Form Six, when they are between 17-19 years old.

boyfriend. Viva's stepfather subtly opposed Viva's sexual orientation by complaining about Viva's being "too careless in exposing their home address". Her stepfather told her that he was afraid that some of the girls might take revenge if they were not satisfied with the ways Viva treated them. Viva thought that her stepfather, who was a police officer, was being overly concerned. However, to reduce the tension in the family, Viva now went to her girlfriend's place instead of bringing her home.

Viva had other sex partners aside from her girlfriends. When I asked her about her position regarding being faithful towards her partners, she said that it was "natural". She explained, "You go and have sex with other people who also want to have sex. It's like when you are hungry, you have to eat. You're attracted to each other, so you go ahead."

Viva had had sex with girls before she actually started dating girls. Her first sexual experience was with one of her classmates when they were in Form Four. One day, Viva and her classmate stayed in school till very late for orchestra rehearsal. "Most people had left already. I forgot what we were talking about, but then we imprudently started kissing each other, and imprudently got into the washroom and did it." They did not become lovers. The following day, they saw each other in school as usual and they remained good friends and classmates. Looking back, Viva found this experience quite unusual, but felt there must be an explanation for why they acted that way on that day, and she could only explain it as curiosity about sex.

Viva's views on sex seemed to be quite different from what we have been taught in school, yet she found her justification because she believed that a lot of women had been fooled into the false consciousness that women did not have sexual desire while men did. In her opinion, women also had sexual desire, and when there was a desire, there needed to be measures to deal with it. She thought it was ok that people

had different ways of dealing with it so long as it did not harm the wellbeing of others.

In Bourdieu's discussion on photography, he proposes that "[p]hotography is taken as a practice or as a cultural work, which appears as 'a privileged means of apprehending', in their most authentic expression, and aesthetic (and ethics) of different groups or classes and particularly the popular 'aesthetic' which can, exceptionally, be manifested in it" (Bourdieu and Boltanski 1990: 130–131). Bourdieu studies three groups of camera users and finds that photography reveals class determinism. For example, his informants from different social classes considered quite differently what the photographable meant and what might be acceptable subjects. Beautiful scenery might be classified as a suitable subject by the working class, but was considered mundane by people from the middle class. Similarly, by showing their differences in acceptance towards different kinds of sex forms, my informants in this group were also trying to create a distinct class from other members of society. When Flora took pride in her dream of becoming a sex worker and how differently she understood sex, she was choosing to distinguish herself from the mundane and inferior class. Similarly, Viva's homosexual orientation and experience of having multiple sex partners all became a source of distinction from the conventional.

Conclusion

Flora had told me about her experiences of "puppy love" and more mature romantic relationships. She told me about her sexual encounters both within and outside a romantic relationship. At the same time, she told me about her romantic relationships that did not involve sex. She also told me about her experience of

dating the divorced man, the man who frequently engaged in commercial sex, and her ambiguous relationship with her “elder brother”. She also mentioned her experience of dating locals as well as foreigners. I thought her experiences could definitely give her one of the most comprehensive and unbeatable sexual “resumes”. It was also quite clear that she had noticed this and was quite proud of her resume, consciously presenting it to me as a kind of qualification to back up her behaviors that would otherwise be defined as odd.

Similarly, Keikei was also as experienced as Flora. She had one-night-stands and multiple partners, and she believed that after all of these experiences, she had found what suited her most. So, she was the one who knew the best.

In addition to extensive dating experiences, Celine, Viva and Ah Wing had one more “weapon” than Flora and Keikei. They thought that most of their ideas were from books on sexuality that other people might not even have had the chance to read or have heard of before. As a result, they were trying to distinguish themselves from the mundane women by their experiences, as well as their general knowledge.

We can see that these radical informants were trying to create an elite class based on their knowledge of sex, whether it was acquired from personal experience or from books. They legitimated their ideas by emphasizing that they were the group who knew the “truth”, for they were the group who had a deeper understanding of sex-related issues, and they possessed more cultural capital than everyone else. They were not afraid of being judged by the moral code or by the standard of the majority, because they had their own high ground and cultural capital.

Foucault argues that sexuality in Victorian times was a secretive matter. At that time, publications were semi-official and were accessible to very few people. This confined sexuality to technical arenas of discussion and was actually a form of

censorship. Sherry Ortner, in her discussion of sexuality, also mentioned, “[i]n Southern Europe, the peasants seem much more concerned about the issue than the upper classes; for elites, the relative freedom of their women is a symbol of their modernity, or simply a symbol of their being above the codes” (Ortner 1996: 55). Thus, my radical informants thought that if one possessed certain knowledge of sex, it marked them off as belonging to a group with special powers and thus, being above censorship.

Yet, were my radical informants really as radical as they thought? The answer is no. For example, when Ah Wing quoted her admiration of the Catholic girl who went to church wearing a mini-skirt, she was implying that wearing a mini-skirt signified a person’s open-mindedness. Such an association was as dogmatic as her teacher’s idea that one should not drink orange juice at parties. When Viva was trying to deconstruct the connection between love and sex, she used frequency of sexual intercourse as an indicator of how much passion was left. When she claimed that virginity was nothing, she was afraid of getting involved with virgins, because she feared that having sex with virgins might induce responsibility. When Flora was having different sexual partners, she carefully avoided revealing her sexual history in order to avoid common friends. This is because she still wished to be defined as a “good” girl by pretending to have a reserved sexual attitude and minimal sexual experience. From how she rejected virgin males, we can see that she carefully avoided males who have less experience than her, so that her partners would take up the leading role in the process of sexual intercourse. This would make her the more innocent player among the two, and would enable her to fit into the conventional model of how women should behave in sex. When Keikei said virgins and non-virgins made no difference to her, she used the word “lucky” to describe herself

upon finding out that one of her girlfriends was a virgin. These examples proved that while the radical informants might have more sexual experience, this did not indicate that they meant to challenge the patriarchal ideas that effectively control female sexuality.

Chapter 5 Conclusion

In this thesis, I have asked the following research questions: 1) What are the differences and similarities between informants who have made different sexual choices? 2) How do they justify their behaviors? 3) How does this reflect the changes and continuities of social norms acting on unmarried females in Hong Kong? In the following sections, I will discuss the three questions one by one.

Variations and Conformities

The field data collected shows that my informants held diverse, yet simultaneously converging views on sexuality and virginity.

In my analysis, I divided my informants into three groups: the “moralists”, the “mainstreams”, and the “radicals”. In Chapter Two, I showed that the first group of women, the “moralists”, held conservative ideas about virginity and sexuality. I found that this group of women led an ascetic life and that they took pride in being virgins, as sex could only be legitimized by getting married.

In Chapter Three, I discussed the second group of informants’ sexual concepts and practices. This was the “mainstreams” group, who had pre-marital sex with all or some of the partners whom they had dated. I examined their reasons for having pre-marital sex and found that pre-marital sex was the assumed rule of the game. They believed that in today’s Hong Kong society, love had replaced marriage in serving as a gatekeeper for sex. So, as one informant said, “If you love that person, you will have sex with them.” They did not think that they needed to provide any

justifications for what they were doing because they were simply doing what was most common in the society.

Chapter Four examined why the third group of informants, the “radicals”, thought that it was okay to have sex with anybody they wanted to, whenever they wanted to. They challenged the idea that sex should be limited within the contexts of marriage and love. This group of informants believed that they had a better understanding of the issues than all other groups of women. They felt proud of what they had acquired in terms of their understanding of female sexuality, thus they were willing to experiment with sex and talk openly about their views on sex.

At first glance, the three groups of informants were very different people in terms of their sexual practices and beliefs. However, if we look at how they understood love, sex and marriage, we see amazingly coherent values. In this concluding chapter, I am going to point out how my informants were similar despite their differing sexual concepts and practices, and how these commonalities reflect the social context in which they were situated.

Age

In his book *The Transformation of Intimacy*, Giddens points out that some females feel that “they have an entitlement to engage in sexual activity at whatever age [that seems] to be appropriate to them” (Giddens 1992: 10). Similarly, all of my informants mentioned age as a consideration for whether to get into a dating relationship, to have premarital sex, or to consider a marriage.

Ah On felt that she was too old to begin dating someone at the age of 18, but she felt that the ideal age to get married should be around 23 to 24. Ah Mei felt that getting married in her thirties would still be appropriate. Nga Wun felt that it was too

casual to have sex at the age of 15, but that it would also be tragic if a woman were still a virgin by the age of 30. April felt it would be abnormal if she were still a virgin because she was already 27. Celine felt that she started to have sexual urges and started to enjoy sex around the age of 18 or 19. Different informants quoted different ages as the ideal age of getting married, having sex, or starting a romantic relationship. It seems that society provides freedom both for people who wish to have sex early, and for those who wish to marry late. Thus it may seem that in present-day Hong Kong society people have the freedom to have different plans for their life pursuits. However this is not the case.

From the age range mentioned by my informants, it is not difficult to find out that society has certain expectations for women. There is a limited age range in which females should perform different roles. A female is expected to start dating, get married, or have sex within this age range, and these actions should follow a certain sequence. People who do not follow such a sequence at the appropriate ages would be considered as outcasts. For example, society expects females to get married before thirty; so a woman who is over thirty and is still a virgin would be pitied upon or considered weird. This shows that society values the marriage system, and expects everyone to get married. This is especially true for women: when men need to achieve certain economic class, or certain position in their workplace by a certain age; women are expected to place more importance on their marriage, or would be considered a failure.

Virginity

From the in-depth interviews with my informants, I found that all informants had imagined how their first sexual experience should be. The imagination of the

loss of virginity formed a very clear picture of femininity, which includes the following characteristics: 1) loss of virginity must come with pain, 2) bleeding would occur, 3) it is something sacred, 4) it should be sweet and memorable, 5) it should happen within a romantic relationship, 6) it should be done with the person that one is in love with, and finally, 7) it is a precious gift to give somebody, and girls should get something in return. However, in reality, we see another set of characteristics accompanying the informants' loss of virginity: 1) there was a lack of romantic love, 2) there was nothing special about the first time, 3) not many informants described it as painful, and 4) they did not report bleeding after the first experience of intercourse. Real-life sexual experience told these women that the loss of virginity was not enjoyable, and it was not sacred — instead, it was definitely dirty for some of my informants. Even the pain which should have formed an essential part of the event was not a unique experience, it definitely correlated with the first time. What was worse, the person they had sex with for their first sexual experience may not even be a person that they were in love with. Additionally, as these girls and women did not get anything in return, they felt that their partners did not treat them as special persons. Thus, we see that not only did my informants have a misplaced concept of the loss of virginity, their idea of virginity was also imaginary.

Typing “virgin” as the keyword on the Internet, I found many links to ways of identifying a virgin physically. However, as the hymen could be easily reconstructed by surgery, more and more criteria of virginity have been developed over time. To sum up the online information, the criteria are that virgins: 1) should have firm breasts which do not spread to the two sides, as this would be a sign of not having been pressed down by the male's body during sexual intercourse; 2) should walk with their arms close to the sides of the body; 3) should have a pleasant smell (as

men's bodily fluids would turn a virgin's body odor turbid); 4) should have neat eyebrows (as upon receiving male sex hormones, women's hairs would start to grow uncontrollably); 5) should have fewer pubic hairs, which grow neatly in one direction. In addition, there is a definite shape and color of the labia majora and labia minora — they should be tucked in and have a rosy pink color.

It does seem that virgins should be easy to identify! However, in reality, not many of my informants knew that these could be considered methods to identify virgins. Some informants were not even sure if they were still virgins or not. Only one informant, Keikei, said that she had noticed that the texture of the breasts of one of her girlfriends had become softer after she lost her virginity, but still, she needed to ask that girl in order to confirm her suspicion.

So, if virgins could not be physically identified, and if the first sexual experience was not unique at all, why was there so much imagination of virgins and the loss of virginity? This is because, in a patriarchal society, males could control females through the control of female sexuality. In order to control female sexuality, there has to be a set of standards for both males and females to follow. These imaginations of sexuality, and thus virginity, created a frame of reference for social action. As a consequence, females are treated like goods that need to be examined carefully against the standard criteria.

These criteria for virgins are diffused into other realms of everyday life, such that not only is a woman required to be a virgin upon marriage, but she also needs to act like a virgin even after marriage. For example, there are lots of female health supplements available in chain pharmacies or online stores. While a lot of these supplements are beauty enhancement products, some aim to enhance the woman's so-called "inner beauty". In one of the advertisements of such supplements, it is

claimed that the product helps to tighten up the loosened vagina, increase sexual excitement, eliminate the unpleasant noise during intercourse, and cut down on the chance of their husbands taking mistresses.⁴⁰ This suggests that not being like a virgin is a good enough excuse for the husband's disloyalty in marriage. Although increased sexual pleasure is quoted as being one of the effects of the product, we can see that the product superficially targeting female customers is actually trying to increase the males' sexual pleasure. Women, in this case, are merely passive recipients of male sexual advances. Their feelings are not taken into consideration. As passive objects, women's bodies are being compared against an imagined ideal body — a virgin's body. Anything that is not as appealing should thus be removed and reshaped into the more appealing form. This commoditization of women is possible with the help of medical technologies, and the spread of new media makes such information widely available and rapidly disseminated.

It seems that virgins are always preferred over non-virgins. But this, in reality, is not the case. From my research, it is interesting to see that there is a hierarchy for virginity. A woman who has not engaged in any form of sexual experience would be considered a "real" virgin. If she has had oral sex or other forms of sexual behavior, even if she still has an intact hymen, she can only be considered as "technically" a virgin. However, being a "technical" virgin is still better than being a "fake" virgin, which refers to a woman who has had hymen reconstructive surgery. Even within the group of "real" virgins, certain sub-levels exist. For example, a "real" virgin in her early twenties would be highly appreciated; a "real" virgin in her early forties is so rare that she might be suspected to be abnormal. A "real" virgin who is pretty would

⁴⁰Website of Royal Pure International (Asia) Limited, distributor of a product for tightening up loosened vagina, <http://www.royalpure.com.hk/>, accessed 5 May 2011. |

be praised for her determination to keep her virginity. A “real” virgin who is plain or unattractive in appearance would be seen as unwanted by men, and thus, as an undesirable commodity, so her virginity would more or less indicate a kind of failure.

This clearly shows that women are treated as commodities for male consumption. Their hymen is one of the most important attributes, which acts like a seal of quality. A woman without a hymen becomes a second-hand product, or perhaps a product that has already started the process of deterioration. Furthermore, a reconstructed hymen is only a replica of the real product. Similar to many other commodities, the hymen has an expiration date. After the expiry date, some people think the hymen is worthless. Coincidentally, this critical point of when the commodity would expire is the socially expected marriage age. This brings out the idea that we expect all women to get married, and women can only actualize their worth when they are married to men.

As virgins would be classified into different categories, ways of losing virginity would also be ranked. Some ways are considered better and more legitimate than others. For example, if a girl has broken her hymen without the intention of having sex, but out of curiosity, she would be considered foolish. If a girl has broken her hymen while doing exercises, she would be considered as unlucky and would be pitied. In contrast to the above two cases, losing virginity with the intention of sex is considered more worthy. Furthermore, losing virginity with a male counterpart is more worthy than losing it while masturbating. Losing virginity upon marriage is more encouraged than losing it before marriage. Losing it for a person you love is more worthy than losing it for a person who eventually cheats on you. From this hierarchy, we can clearly see that women actually do not have control over their own body, while men do. Thus, taking a woman’s virginity is considered something that is

worth achieving for a man.

Sex hierarchy

According to the Oxford English Dictionary (2011), a virgin is a person, typically a woman, who has never had sexual intercourse. Although all of my informants mentioned the hymen as a criteria of virginity, all of them except Keikei would define a virgin as somebody without sexual experience, rather than as somebody with an intact hymen. So, in order to understand who a virgin is, we need to know what is considered sexual experience.

So, what is sex? It is very clear from the field data that some forms of sex are more commonly accepted and would be considered as sexual experience by all the informants, while other forms of sex were more ambiguous.

One informant mentioned that whether a woman was a virgin depended on whether her vagina had been penetrated by a penis or not. From her point of view, the penis and vagina are sex organs, while sex toys, tampons or fingers could not be classified as sex organs. Thus, a girl could still claim her virgin status even if she had her hymen damaged during masturbation or by any other kind of object except for a male's penis. The underlying meaning of this is that only penile penetration of the vagina was considered sex, while other forms of sex were not "real" sex. In order to perform so-called "real" sex, there had to be a man and a woman participating in the act. All of my informants agreed penile penetration of the vagina could be defined as sex. However, when we examine this definition of sex carefully, we see that it gives recognition only to heterosexual behavior and not to homosexual behavior.

My informants were more willing to accept the intercourse between a male and

a female as proper sexual experience. Only a few gender-conscious people mentioned sexual relationships between people of the same sex. My lesbian informants, of course, would not consider a penis necessary for intercourse; however, they also underrated homosexual experience just as the heterosexuals did. Coco, for example, believed that she could still say to her next boyfriend that she was a virgin. Thus, we can see that no matter whether the informants rejected homosexual orientation all together, or if they had been practicing it, subconsciously all of them believed that the heterosexual experience was a more “recognizable” form of sex.

Similarly, Viva emphasized that having a relationship with a girl cost her nothing. Here we can see that the concept of “loss” refers to a biological chance of getting pregnant, while at the same time, it is also the psychological feeling of being taken advantage of. Viva felt that having sex with a boy made her suffer because that would mean she had also lost sexual purity.

In addition to homosexual experience, my informants had quite extreme yet coherent views about oral sex. Some thought that oral sex was not real sex but rather a kind of foreplay, and others defined oral sex as a much more sinful act than vaginal sex. It is not difficult to understand why these informants thought that oral sex was morally incorrect. If vaginal sex were the proper way of having sex, all other types of sex were deviant. Chris, for example, described the oral sex scene that she was forced to watch as aberrant. It’s also easy to explain why some informants would be willing to accept oral sex than vaginal sex. If vaginal sex was the only standard form of sex, other types of sexual behavior would be considered less important and less intimate. Thus, having oral sex meant one was really not having sex per se, and therefore it was no big deal.

Although different informants had very different ideas about oral sex, the reason

behind their acceptance or rejection was the same. To them, oral sex, compared to vaginal sex, was a more ambiguous, improper, or nonstandard form of sex. This clearly shows that there is a hierarchy of sex. To my informants, some forms of sexual experiences were performed and recognized socially, and were therefore normalized and considered to be better forms of sex.

Two of my homosexual informants, Keikei and Viva, said to me that they had tried engaging in orgies, and three other informants told me they had experience with one-night-stands. A few more told me about their masturbation experiences. But I have not heard of any anal sex experiences among them. “Cross generational sex” was quoted by one of my informants as “a tragedy”. Sex between human beings and nonhumans was never mentioned. Just as Gale Rubin (1998) has discussed, a sex hierarchy exists when there is a differentiation between good sex and bad sex, and it is constructed by various discourses. These discourses delimit a very small portion of human sexual capacity as sanctified, safe, healthy, mature, legal, and politically correct. The types of sexuality that fall inside this category are heterosexual, marital, monogamous, reproductive, and noncommercial, and they should also be coupled, relational, within the same generation, and occur at home, while sex forms that violate these rules are bad, abnormal, or unnatural. Although more than 20 years have passed since Rubin published her paper, we can see that Hong Kong females’ understanding of sexual behavior was still very much confined by this sexual hierarchy. To them, appropriate sexual behavior needs to be monogamous and noncommercial.

Rubin’s generalizations about a sexual hierarchy are valid in most cases, but we can see one change, which is associated with contraception. In Rubin’s schema, procreative sex is better than non-procreative sex. However, among my interviewees,

only Ah Mei, who was a baptized Christian thought that wearing a condom would make sex less sacred and inferior because sex would not be done for the purpose of reproduction. The idea of wearing a condom or other contraceptive device was well accepted among my informants, and for a majority of the informants, it was a manifestation of being responsible and considerate. On the other hand, sex which resulted in unwanted pregnancies would be considered impetuous and irresponsible.

Females as sexual objects

As discussed earlier, my male friend who preferred virgins frankly told me that non-virgins were secondhand products, like canned food that had been opened, or a bottle of distilled water that had been drunk from. From the terminology used by my informants too, it is not difficult to see that all three groups of informants used business concepts to describe their relationships. The give and take in a relationship was understood as a gain-loss, or success-failure dichotomy.

For example, my moralist informants all mentioned that having sex before marriage would be a loss for a girl. The parents always warned their daughters not to have sex with their boyfriends. This is because they thought that the boy could devalue or accuse the girl for her previous sexual experiences unless he married her.

My mainstream informants said that they did not feel it was “*sit6 dai2*” (a loss, as in a bad deal) for a woman to have sex with a man, while my radical informants mentioned that it would be a great loss if you could not enjoy sexual pleasure. Viva used this analogy: “If you go to the bar, pay the entrance fee, and do not pick up anybody to spend the night with you in the end, that’s a real loss.” We can see that they were transplanting their understanding of business relations to another aspect of life, especially their relationships with their sex partners. In a way, this shows that

capitalism is enormously influential in Hong Kong society, but it also reinforces the ideology that the body is a commodity, and sex can be bought and sold. All of my informants wished their sexual capital could help them gain something. Sometimes, such a “gain” could be a stable marriage relationship with a person of higher socio-economic status, or it could be recognition of their high moral standards. Sometimes the “gain” would be a fulfilling sexual experience, and at the same time a cultural marker of having a liberal mind. Sometimes, the “gain” could be recognition of their cultural capital, which should be identified with the male sex, and thus implied that the woman possessing such knowledge was as good as men.

Obviously, how sex-related knowledge is used is a very fluid process. The moralist group wished to use sexual purity to achieve hypergamy, which means gaining an elevated social status through the process of marriage. They said that girls should “save themselves” for an anticipated engagement and marriage. The more willingly women wished to have sex with men, the more impure they were. The more impure a woman was, the less she would be valued. That explains why the terminology “cheap” was used to describe women who would have sex readily.

This rational economic calculation was also common among the mainstream informants. The reason for them to accept pre-marital sex was that they did not suffer any bad consequences. In their own words, they did not feel “*sit6 dai2*”, as they believed that men of this era did not expect to date and marry virgins. Being too strict and not giving any room for the male’s sexual possessiveness might even result in a loss, such as preventing one’s dream man from approaching you or not being able to keep a romantic relationship. The radical group queried why men could have casual sexual relationships while women could not. To them, a chance to have sex was a gain, while the lack of sexual liberation was a loss.

While sex seemed to be highly instrumental, and seemed to be a manifestation of capitalist social relations, paradoxically, it could be understood as an embodiment of aspirations of love. I will discuss this in the following section.

Love

All my informants recognized that love was an important factor in shaping their sexual experiences and attitudes. They all made similar definitions of love and classified love as a binary combination of two types of feelings. One kind of love is romantic and passionate, while another kind of love is stable and permanent.

For the moralist group, love, in reality, was a long-term relationship, while romantic love was only an ideal. They believed that a long-term relationship with a person should be sealed by getting married with that person, and sex must be reserved for this long-term relationship.

For the mainstreams group, loving someone could sometimes be romantic and stable at the same time. Sex was a marker of there being “enough” love. However, this idea of “enough” could be very diversified. For some people, having passion was “enough”. For other informants, “enough” meant that the partner had all of the desirable characteristics of a marriage partner.

For the radicals, romantic love existed in reality and was something readily accessible. Long-term relationships would only be an aspiration; therefore there was no need to reserve sex for any anticipated long-term relationship. To them, sex was an expression of passion.

Since love was such an abstract concept, sex was used to operationalize it. Having certain sexual practices was only a representation of the informants’ concepts of love. This seemed to apply to the concept of marriage as well.

Marriage

The marriage system was obviously pervasive and influential at all levels. We can see that for my moralist informants, marriage acted as the gatekeeper to sex. For mainstream informants, the reason for having pre-marital sex was because they knew that they were about to get married. Although some informants expressed that they would refuse the idea of marriage, and wished to deny the connection between sex and marriage, none of them tried to challenge the marriage system itself.

Just as Ah Wing mentioned, she wished to get married if she could find a person who possessed all three characteristics of being a good boyfriend, good sex partner and good husband.

Soso and Viva were sure that they would not get married. However, their real reason behind such resolution was because they were afraid of getting divorced. Rather than being dissatisfied with the marriage system, they were worried that they would abuse the sacredness of marriage. From this, we can see that they embraced the idea that once a couple was married, they should stay together forever.

Celine claimed that cohabitation was better than marriage, and would be ready to persuade people to try cohabitation before getting married. At first glance, this seems to show that she greatly disliked the idea of marriage. However when we look carefully, she believed cohabitation would help to make sure that a couple would be sexually compatible. She would advise people to cohabit, as she had seen enough unhappy marriages, especially between her parents. For Celine, marriage should be a happy union between two matching people.

In reality, marriage could be loveless and at the same time sexless, however it remained an ultimate choice, an aspiration or a life goal for all of my informants. So

instead of making love or sex a necessarily condition for marriage, they transposed economic stability, responsibility, and filial duty as the three major components of a marriage.

Why do they conform? Patriarchy!

Gendered Sexuality

Almost all of my informants would agree to the following points about sexuality. First of all, they agreed that females had weaker sexual urges than males. Secondly, they thought that females should be more reserved in sex, and that women were more capable of controlling themselves, meaning that it was more legitimate for men to have more sexual desire, more curiosity and innovations about sex. Although some “radical” informants did not really fall under such norms, this does not mean that they believed that females could be as sexually active as males. Viva and Keikei were two women who felt very proud of their sexual histories. However, when they talked about their sexual histories, they were both emphasizing their emulation of male behavior and that they were playing a masculine role, as in heterosexual relationships. Ah Wing felt that sex was a biological necessity, and she liked to explore different forms of sexual behavior, saying, “I think I’m like a man.” This shows that deep in her mind, she believed that an ordinary woman should not be as open as men. Celine said that she would observe her partner’s “*chong4 ban2*” (床品) because males were driven by their sexual urges. This implies that females are less affected by their sexual urges than males, so while having sex, they can still rationally analyze whether or not the partner is a good man by observing his performance in bed. Flora has quite extensive sexual experience, yet she chose to have partners with more sexual experience than her in order to achieve the

comparative sexual purity.

In Hartmann's discussion of patriarchy, she claims that,

[m]en exercise their control in receiving personal service work from women, in not having to do housework or rear children, in having access to women's bodies for sex, and in feeling powerful and being powerful (Hartmann 2003: 214).

A lot of my informants held similar ideas to this. For example, Soso found herself always emulating her father's behavior, and she would actively take up the male role in sex by choosing her partners instead of being chosen passively. She thought that women are passive and vulnerable, so it was impossible for males to be chosen by females.

Ah Fen told me that keeping their virginity was one of the most important things that girls should do to protect themselves from the harm of men. Many more informants expressed that it was usually the girl who was hurt when a relationship failed to work out, and thus they would carefully evaluate their potential sex partners for their trustworthiness. When Viva wished to have a more equal relationship with her girlfriend, she accused her girlfriend by saying, "You are a woman who needs to be adored. But so am I!" She believed that women needed to be adored, to be protected, and to be treated categorically nicely because they were the weaker sex.

I started this thesis by pointing out several interesting paradoxes related to sexuality in Hong Kong, and here I would like to explain them using the idea that sexuality is gendered.

The first paradox was why some Hong Kong females can be so conservative as to think that they should not have the right to enjoy sex, while at the same time think so little of the consequences of sex. With the data collected in this study, I think that

this is because, deep in their personal beliefs, females agree that their sexuality is controlled by males, not by themselves. Even if they have received a high level of education, and even if they are economically independent, they still need to be submissive in their sexual relations. Since they do not think that they could have control over their own sexuality, they would have sex when men asked them to do so. Thus, they would give their bodies to their male partner, whether it is a casual sex partner, a boyfriend, or a husband.

The second paradox was why the median age at first sex has been decreasing over the past decades, but at the same time virginity is still being held in high esteem. This is because in a patriarchal society, males need to acquire control over female's sexual capital, and one way of making sure they have this control is to ensure females' virginity and chastity. Sex-related information is abundant and readily available in Hong Kong today, but it is not difficult to find that all these information are trying to bring out the same message — “only virgins and chaste women deserve to be loved”. When sex is portrayed as an expression of love, and when males have sexual monopoly over females, females would agree to have sex in the hopes that sex could secure a romantic relationship. Just like Ho has argued in her paper (2005), sex is no big deal, but at the same time it is the real deal.

The third paradox is why females would perform differently in front of different people. This is because, in a patriarchal society, females need to submit to their families' control before marriage, while after marriage they need to become subordinated under their husbands. Thus, virginity is only important when it comes to the role of a daughter, a wife (or girlfriend) or a potential daughter-in-law. That explains why people are so careful about revealing their sexual histories to their family, or to their husbands and their families.

Patriarchy and Good Womanhood

Heidi Hartmann defined patriarchy as “a set of social relations between men, which have a material base, and which through, hierarchical [relations], establish or create interdependence and solidarity among men that enable them to dominate women. Though patriarchy is hierarchical and men of different classes, races, or ethnic groups have different places in the patriarchy, they are also united in their shared relationship of dominance over their women” (Hartmann 2003: 211).

Women who wanted to be married properly were required to be virgins at marriage. This is because they believed that males who are looking for serious relationships would only date and marry virgins. This is illustrated by the case of my moralist informants.

In the case of my mainstream informants, we can see that they tried to be understanding girlfriends who knew how to submit to their boyfriends' sexual needs. These women simultaneously tried to keep up the image of a good woman by confining their sexual histories to as small a number of people as possible, so that their reputation would not be put at risk. In this way, they would play the role of being good daughters (as they would not disgrace their natal families) and of being good wives (as the husband and his family would not be aware of their premarital sexual experience). They did this because they believed that males should have a sexual monopoly over their girlfriends as long as the relationship was stable.

In the case of my radical informants, they tried to be good sexual partners while at the same time trying not to become “wives”. This was because they believed that males who were looking for a sexual relationship would not want to bear the responsibility of a marriage.

My informants treated their sexuality differently because they had different imaginations of what males would desire. As pointed out by Hartmann, "All men, whatever their rank in the patriarchy, are bought off by being able to control at least some women." From the above examples, we can see that every group of female tried to be good women according to their imaginations of male desires, and the result of this is, in the end all females confined themselves socially and culturally in order to be good women in the eyes of their male counterpart and fit into the patriarchal standard of good womanhood.

Hartmann says that patriarchy, like capital, can change over time and can be very flexible. In my research, the individual behavioral differences among the various groups of informants were the result of conflicting standards and requirements by different patriarchies. For example, the first group of women needed to be moral in order to be included in the patriarchal family and marriage structure. In Rubie Watson's article (2004) about women's status in Hong Kong's villages, she provides a good example of why and how ideological control over women is worked out in villages in Hong Kong. She states that women can only be recognized as somebody's wife, somebody's mother, or somebody's daughter, otherwise they would be considered as dangerous. For example, an unwed woman would become a wandering ghost when she died; her soul would have nowhere to reside and so she would return to haunt her natal family. Today, people in Hong Kong may not believe that a woman must get married in order to acquire a status in society, and they would not believe in stories of wandering ghosts anymore either. But even when my moralist informants were "Westernized" and "modernized" by having converted to Christianity, they had not gotten rid of their patriarchal ideas. In Hong Kong society, women in general still abide by ideological values of the patriarchal family, with the

male as the head and the female as a subordinate member.

For the mainstream informants, we can see that they would only have sex with their potential husbands, but also that they were not trying to challenge the husband's sexual monopoly over them. In a patriarchal system, as suggested by Hartmann, controlling women's access to resources and their sexuality allows men to control women's labor power, for the purpose of serving men in any personal and sexual way, and for the purpose of rearing children (Hartmann 2003: 212). To my mainstream informants, sex was actually one of the obligations of a potential wife in return for a long-term relationship. They would not be identified as bad women because of their pre-marital sexual experience because they were just trying to fulfill the patriarchal expectations of women. They restrained their sexuality by limiting their sexual behavior only to their potential husbands. Furthermore, by limiting the number of potential husbands, even if they did not marry these men, the women would still be able to hide their sexual histories.

The radicals denied the association between sex and marriage entirely. However, this does not mean that they were trying to challenge the patriarchal marriage system. We can see that these "radical" females did, in many cases, aspire to get married. Instead of viewing the marriage system as distorted and problematic, they saw themselves as unsuitable candidates of the perfect marriage system.

To the radical informants, being knowledgeable and experienced in sex was a way to know what their partners wanted, so that they could perform well in the role of a good partner and thus act as good women. While these were not the reasons they expressly articulated, they did think of themselves as good women, as they would not interfere with other people's marriage, and hence they avoided challenging the sacred system of marriage.

Changes and Continuities in Social Context

According to Appadurai (2008), changes in society can be considered in five areas or 'scapes': "ethnoscapes", referring to the flow of people; "mediascapes", referring to the flow of information; "technoscapes", referring to the flow of technology; "financescape," referring to the flow of money; and "ideoscapes", referring to the flow of ideas. I will apply the framework in my analysis of the social context in which concepts and behaviors around female sexuality in Hong Kong develop.

Considering "mediascape", we can see that sex-related materials are easily accessible in Hong Kong. When combined with changes in "technoscape", young people spend more and more hours each day on the Internet and it is possible to access sex-related materials from all over the world with just one click. Consider "Financescape", women could achieve more or less equal chance of employment and are more economically independent, which result in changes in power relations especially in resisting their parents' arrangement. Consider "ethnoscape", we can see that Hong Kong as a travel hub has also allowed a lot of young people to travel and study abroad. Among my 18 informants, six mentioned their experiences of living abroad. Many of their ideas about sex were changed in the process. However, Hong Kong is extremely conservative in "ideoscapes": from my field data, we can see that despite my informants' different expressions of sexuality, they all conformed to patriarchal ideas. To explain this, we have to look at the unique socio-cultural context of Hong Kong, which enabled some things to change but not others.

My informants were concerned about many different things in deciding whether or not to have sex. Their concerns could be divided into three levels: the material

level, the social level, and the ideological level. I am going to analyze these changes and continuities that occurred at the three levels below, and elicit the social-cultural context that has shaped these females' understanding of their sexuality.

On the material level, drastic changes have taken place in the last few decades. Condoms for example can be easily bought in convenience stores, supermarkets, and pharmacies. In recent years, advertisements made by the Hong Kong government promoting safe sex through the use of condoms can be seen on all TV channels during prime time. The use of condoms is indeed widely accepted in Hong Kong. Condoms break the tie between sex and reproduction, as well as efficaciously prevent sexually transmitted diseases. They have enabled women to have sex without worrying about the negative physical consequences. In addition "cosmetics" are developed to lighten the skin color of the genital areas. Then there are "health products" targeted at tightening the vagina, and "personal care products" to be inserted in the vagina to simulate the virgin status, including tightness, pain and bleeding. Such products are easily available — whether from online shops or over the counter in chain pharmacies like Watsons. They are sold at quite affordable prices — from a few hundred to a few thousand Hong Kong dollars. To go further, a woman can even have hymen reconstruction surgery, which allows her to "become" a virgin again. These products and technologies all enable females to reconstruct their virginity, and to conceal their sexual experience.

On the social level, after the implementation of the nine-year compulsory education policy in 1978, boys and girls in Hong Kong had equal chances of receiving basic schooling. In 2008, Form Four to Form Six have also become free, but not compulsory. The importance of education is being recognized, and knowledge is being perceived as a form of capital. This educational opportunity is

combined with ample job opportunities for women. According to a large scale survey done in 2002, it was estimated that female workers occupied 45 percent of the employed population in private companies and non-governmental sectors in Hong Kong. (Women's Commission 2002) Women's participation in the labor force has allowed them to be able to support themselves economically. When women's livelihoods do not depend solely on marriage, they can choose to stay single and are not obligated to exchange financial security with sex in marriage. Economic independence to some extent has allowed more sexual choices for women in Hong Kong. Additionally, Christianity has gained popularity in Hong Kong since British colonization. Five of my informants had been baptized as Christians. One had previously been to church and fellowship regularly, and one would pray to God when she had troubles. Although only 5% of the total population is Protestant, and another 5% Catholic, many more were influenced by Christian ideology.

In addition to the symbolic meanings embedded in marriage, a marriage in Hong Kong today consists of a set of calculation and careful planning. Taking wedding photos, choosing wedding dresses and wedding rings, as well as pre-marital slimming and skin care, the costly wedding banquets, and the honeymoon that follows... everything involves a lot of money and effort. Wedding has become a consumption product, boosted by numerous wedding magazines sold in bookstores as well as convenience stores, the many wedding exhibitions held throughout the year, and even loan companies. . As one tv advertisements says, "[T]hanks to xxx company which provides loans with the lowest interest rates, so that we can repay the money that we overspent on our wedding!". Marriage in Hong Kong is highly commercialized and increasingly extravagant, and thus more and more unaffordable for the average person. To many would-be couples, having their own apartment is

part of the wedding plan, and in anticipation of a rise in real estate prices, many potential couples would move in the new apartment before the wedding, which allows room for pre-marital sex.

The family was considered a very important factor by all of my informants in shaping their ideas towards sex. Hong Kong families seem to be extremely influential when compared to those in other places of the world. When exploring why families are so powerful, I found that unlike in the United States where children above 18 usually move out, young adults in Hong Kong live with their parents for a relatively long period of time. Even if they prefer not to live with their parents at all, they are economically constrained and unable to leave the family as houses are extremely costly. The lack of personal space for an adult before marriage has been an unsolvable problem in Hong Kong.

It may be argued that staying with one's family until one gets married is a common practice in Chinese societies, so the pervasiveness of the family is not a unique phenomenon in Hong Kong. However, I would like to point out that Hong Kong is unique because of its geographical location and political situation. For example, in mainland China, high school graduates would leave home for university education in different parts of the country. In Hong Kong, the majority of high school graduates would enroll in one of nine local universities. Geographically, Hong Kong is small and it is possible to get to one end of Hong Kong from the other within two hours by public transport. Unless one goes abroad to study, it is unlikely that a young person could get away from family control.

In a survey by The Hong Kong Council of Social Service, it was found that 40.8% of female respondents worried about getting pregnant after having sex for the first time. (The Hong Kong Council of Social Service 2006) It would be logical to

think that with the changes on the material level that have enabled safer sex, women would have better sex. However, safer sex does not necessarily lead to the empowerment of females. In examining the negotiation of sexual boundaries of young women, scholars pointed out that “it is easy to talk of how to empower young women so as to make sex safer or more pleasurable, but it is more difficult to specify what exactly is meant by empowerment in sexual relations when women are subordinate to men.” (Janet Holland, Ramazanoglu, Sharpe and Thomson 1996: 264) Contraceptive devices did not empower females in sexual relations, and other new inventions or products, and medical developments, have even helped to reinforce ideological values that glorify virginity and sexual purity.

Consider religion. It seems on the surface that conversion to a Western religion like Christianity would signify Westernization and a symbol of modernity for individual converts. However, the Christian ideology on female sexuality is as repressive as that in Chinese culture. There are strong negations of femininity, such as rigidly defined roles for women as subordinate to their husband; clear rules on how a marriage should exist; and mandates that sexuality, especially female sexuality, should be repressed. Ideal women should be like the Virgin Mary, who was sexually innocent even upon giving birth.

The employment situation for women in Hong Kong seems to be quite optimistic too. Instead of seeing sex as their only form of capital, a significant portion of females are placing more importance on their education and career. However, this does not mean that females have been liberated and are free to make any choice. As a female, one is bound by the idea of good womanhood. And this idea of good womanhood would only be manifested in the role of a daughter or a wife. Females may be able to remain single and be able to support themselves, however

they would still be urged to get married by those around them, who believe that economic power will not provide women with the emotional anchor which only marriage and family can provide.

The huge wedding costs and the economic decision to buy a flat in preparation for marriage have provided lee-ways for cohabitation. However, the increasing financial cost of marriage also reflects that people do perceive marriage as more and more important, thus they are willing to spend money on it. Marriage is the ultimate goal, and cohabitation is just one stop on the way to getting married.

We also see from the data that the family as a social institution is rigid and powerful. It not only acted as a panopticon in which the unmarried daughters were closely watched, but it also acted as a primary site of socialization where core values about marriage, family and sexuality were being passed on.

Conclusion

To conclude my thesis, I would say my female informants have very different sexual attitudes and sexual practices. The moralist informants never had premarital sex and believed that they were superior to other groups because they were most morally correct. The mainstream informants engaged in pre-marital sex, but limited it to those persons they were in love with, and usually upon their partner's request. Radical informants would have sex casually and be proud of their sexual knowledge or experience, but they would carefully select their partners so that they would still be considered as the more reserved party.

Despite the differences in my informants' behaviors regarding sex, and the very different reasons that they used to justify what they had been doing, we can see that they shared quite a convergent understanding of love, sex and marriage. The reason

for such conformity is the hegemony of patriarchy. With marriage being the ultimate goal and family being the most influential gatekeeper to sex at both physical and ideological levels, marriage and family serve as the two most powerful institutions in carrying on patriarchal ideas. As a result, single females in different age groups in Hong Kong continue to espouse patriarchal gender concepts and behave in a reserved, passive and restrained way, allowing men to dominate in sexual relationships.

Appendix : Interview protocol

Part A : Basic information

Age.

Education.

Occupation.

Family background.

Religion.

Sexual orientation.

Part B: Dating experience

Have you ever had experience that you had a crush on somebody?

Was there anybody who had a crush on you?

When did you start dating?

Why did you decide to date him/ her (or why did you decide to reject him/ her)?

How did you break up with him or her?

Among all the people that you dated, was there anyone you think who deserves your virginity?

Did your family know that you were dating? How did they react?

Part C: Sexual experience:

When was the first time that you had sex? Where and how did it happen?

Why did you think it was okay to have sex with him/ her?

How was the first sexual experience different or similar to what you had imagined about sex?

Did you have any sexual desire? What did you do with your sexual desire?

What do you think is the most extraordinary (memorable) sexual experience among all your past sexual experience? Why

Do you think it is appropriate to

- a.) have masturbation?
- b.) consume commercial sex?
- c.) use sex toy?
- d.) engage in one night stand?
- e.) watch pornography?
- f.) perform oral sex?

Why do you think it was appropriate/ not appropriate?

Have you ever experienced orgasm? How do you think of your orgasmic experience?

Did your family know about your sexual experience? How would/did they react if they know/ when they knew?

Do you think you love the person that you had sex with? Do you think they love you?

How would you rank the following persons in terms of your willingness to date them?

- a.) a person who does not have any sexual experience,
- b.) a person who has sexual experience,
- c.) a person who has cohabited with his girlfriend before,
- d.) a person who has divorced his wife,
- e.) a person who has divorced his wife and had a kid with his previous wife,
- f.) a person who is married,
- g.) a person who has experience of one-night-stand, commercial sex or extra-marital sex.

Please explain your priority.

References Cited

- Ahern, Emily M. 1975. "The Power and Pollution of Chinese Women." In *Studies in Chinese Society*, pp. 269-290 Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Appadurai, Arjun. 2008. "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy." In Jonathan Xavier Inda and Renato Rosaldo eds., *The Anthropology of Globalization: a Reader*, pp. 47-65 Malden, MA: Blackwell Publisher.
- Bordo Susan. 1993. *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1977. "Structures and the Habitus." In Richard Nice eds., *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, pp. 72-95. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- _____. 1984. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. London: Routledge.
- _____. 1991. *Language and Symbolic Power*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre, and Boltanski, Luc. 1990. *Photography: A Middle-brow Art*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Durex, 2007 "Sexual wellbeing Global Survey". At <http://www.durex.com/zh-hk/aboutdurex/global%20research> accessed 8 Mar 2008.
- Foucault, Michel. 1995. "Docile Bodies." In Alan Sheridan eds., *Discipline and Punish*, pp. 135-169. New York: Vintage Books.
- _____. 1995b. "The Means of Correct Training." In Alan Sheridan eds., *Discipline and Punish*, pp. 170-194. New York: Vintage Books.
- _____. 1995c. "Illegalities and Delinquency." In Alan Sheridan eds., *Discipline and Punish*, pp. 257-292. New York: Vintage Books.
- _____. 1988. *The History of Sexuality*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Giddens, Anthony. 1992. *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Goffman, Erving. 1959. "Performances." In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. London: Penguin
- Hartmann, Heidi. 2003. "The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a More Progressive Union." In Carole R. McCann and Seung-kyung Kim eds., *Feminist Theory Reader: Local and Global Perspectives*, pp. 119-132. New York: Routledge.
- Hinsch, Bret. 2006. "The Criticism of Powerful Women by Western Han Portent Experts." *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 49(1): 96-121.

- Ho, Petula Sik Ying, 2005. "The Real Deal or No Big Deal — Chinese Women in Hong Kong and the Orgasmic Experience." *Issues in Contemporary Culture and Aesthetics* 1(1): 177-187.
- . 2008. "Not So Great Expectations: Sex and Housewives in Hong Kong." *Journal of Sex Research* 45(4): 338-349.
- Ho, Petula Sik Ying, and Tsang, Adolf Ka Tat. 2005. "Beyond the Vagina-clitoris Debate: From Naming the Sex Organ to the Reclaiming of the Body." *Women Studies Forum International* 28(6): 523-534.
- Holland, Janet, Ramazanoglu Caroline, Sharpe Sue, and Thomson Rachel. 1996. "Pressured Pleasure: Young Women and the Negotiation of Sexual Boundaries." In Stevi Jackson and Sue Scott eds., *Feminism and Sexuality: a reader*, pp. 248-285. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Jankowiak, William. 1995. "Romantic Passion in the People's Republic of China." In *Romantic Passion: A Universal Experience?*, pp. 166-183. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Jaschok, Maria. 1998. *Concubines and Bondservants: A social history*. Hong Kong: Oxford University Press.
- Jenkins, Richard. 1992. *Pierre Bourdieu*. New York; London: Routledge.
- Ko, Dorothy. 1994. "Talent, Virtue, and Beauty: Rewriting Womanhood." In Dorothy Ko eds., *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China*, pp. 143-178. Stanford: Stanford University Press
- Kong, Travis. 2005. *The Hidden Voice: The Sexual Politics of Chinese Male Sex Workers*. Hong Kong: The Hong Kong Polytechnic University.
- . 2011. *Chinese Male Homosexualities: Memba Tongchi and Golden Boy*. Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge.
- Lai, Yuen-Ki. 2004. *Lesbian Masculinities: Identity and Body Construction among Tomboys in Hong Kong*. M.Phil. thesis, Department of Anthropology, The Chinese University of Hong Kong.
- Leung, Eugenie. 1985. "Family Support and Postnatal Emotional Adjustment." *Bulletin of the Hong Kong Psychological Society* 14: 32-46.
- Longstaff, Judith Mackay, and Lo, George. 1985. "Wife Battering in Hong Kong: A Preliminary Survey." *Journal of the Hong Kong Medical Association* 37(1): 23-26
- Mead, Margaret. 1935. *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies*. New York: Morrow.
- . 1965. *Coming of Age in Samoa*. New York: Morrow.
- Oakley, Ann. 1996. "Sexuality." In *Feminism and Sexuality: a reader*. pp.175-179. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Ortner, Sherry. 1996. "The Virgin and the State." In *Making Gender: The Politic and Erotics of Culture*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Oxford English Dictionary. 2011. At <http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/virgin> accessed 29 Jun 2011.

- Rougemont, Denis de. 1974. *Love in the Western World*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Rubin, Gayle. 1998. "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality." In Peter M. Nardi and Beth E. Schneider eds., *Social perspectives in lesbian and gay studies: A reader*, pp. 100-133. London: Routledge.
- Sangren, P. Steven. 1983. "Female Gender in Chinese Religious Symbols." *Signs* 9(Autumn): 4-25.
- Stockard, E. Janice. 1989. *Daughters of the Canton Delta: Marriage Patterns and Economic Strategies in South China 1860-1930*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- The Census and Statistics Department. 2007. "Women and Men in Hong Kong Key Statistics" At http://www.byccensus2006.gov.hk/FileManager/EN/Content_962/wm_keystat_2007.pdf accessed 28th June 2008.
- The Hong Kong Council of Social Service. 2006. At http://www.hkcss.org.hk/cm/cc/press/documents/sex_data200608.doc accessed 14 June 2009.
- The Hong Kong Federation of Youth Group. 1995. "Teenage Pregnancy- Service and Policy Options." At <http://yrc.hkfyg.org.hk/chi/ys6.html> accessed 13 September 2009.
- Vance, Carole. 1984. "Pleasure and Danger: Toward a Politics of Sexuality." In C. Vance eds., *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*, pp. 1-27. Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Watson, James. 1982. "Of Flesh and Bones: The Management of Death Pollution in Cantonese Society." In Maurice Bloch and Jonathan Parry eds., *Death and the Regeneration of life*, pp.155-186. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Watson, Rubie. 2004a. "The Named and the Nameless: Gender and Person in Chinese Society," In James L. Watson and Rubie S. Watson eds., *Village life in Hong Kong: Politics, Gender and Ritual in the New Territories*, pp. 199-220. Hong Kong: Chinese University Press.
- _____. 2004b "Wives, Concubines, and Maids: Servitude and Kinship in the Hong Kong Region, 1900-1940." In James L. Watson and Rubie S. Watson eds., *Village life in Hong Kong: Politics, Gender and Ritual in the New Territories*, pp. 169-198. Hong Kong: Chinese University Press.
- Women's Commission. 2002. Survey on the Extent and Level of Positions taken up by Women in the Private and Non-governmental Sectors in Hong Kong
- Wilson, Edward O. 1975. "The Morality of the Gene." In Edward O Wilson eds., *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis*, pp.395-400. Cambridge: Harvard University Press
- Wolf, Margery. 1972. *Women and the Family in Rural Taiwan*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- 王威。 2010。 《性的歷程：從上古道隋唐》武漢市：湖北人民出版社。
- 明報。 2007。 "8000 基督徒集會誓守貞潔"。載《明報》，9月2日，頁A10。

- 香港婦女中心協會。2006。《探討香港性病診所求診婦女的需要與危機之基線研究報告書》。香港: 香港婦女中心協會。
- 章義和, 陳春雷。1999。《貞節史》。上海: 上海文藝出版社。
- 趙元信, 何錫蓉. 1993。《中國歷代女性悲劇大觀》。[中國]: 安徽人民出版社。
- 葉漢明。1999。《主體的追尋: 中國婦女史研究析論》。香港: 香港教育圖書公司。
- 劉達臨, 胡宏霞。2009。《大男女一性學史話》。北京: 華藝出版社。
- 頭條日報。2010。“豪包丁子高千嬅婚宴紅酒 林建岳開心似「嫁女」”。
http://www.hkheadline.com/ent/ent_content.asp?contid=133730&srctype=n 上網日期: 2011 年 2 月 8 日。
- 頭條日報。2008。“團體發表宣言 籲青年拒傳裸照”。2011 年 2 月 25 日, p. 4。
- 譚少薇。2007。“「妻子」VS「二奶」跨境的女性異化想像”，載《中國女性主義》第 9 期 243-260 頁。

CUHK Libraries



004806855